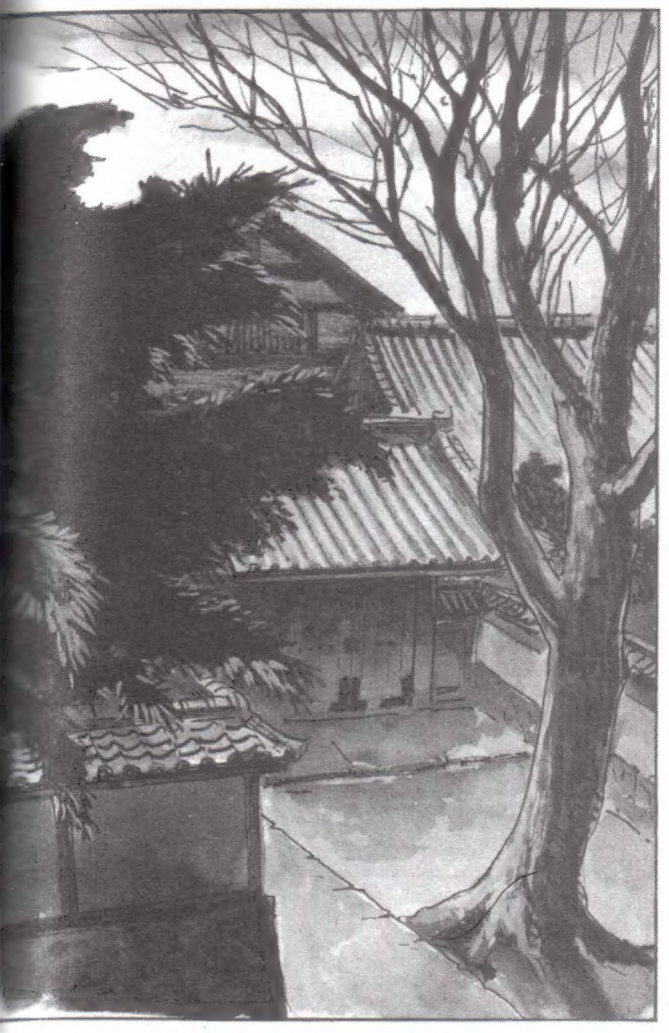
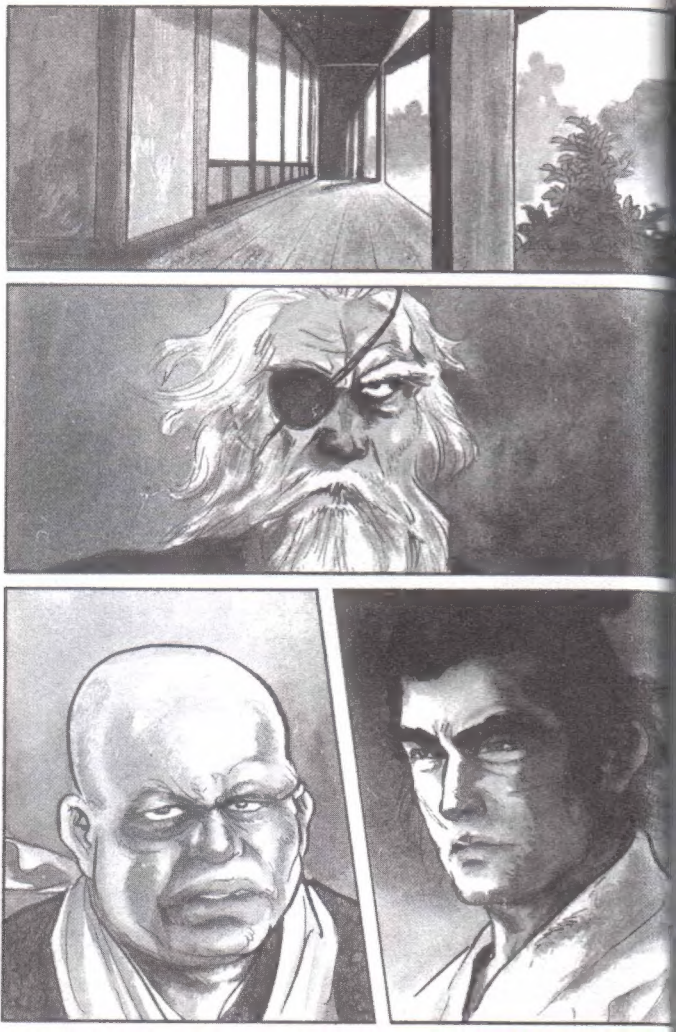
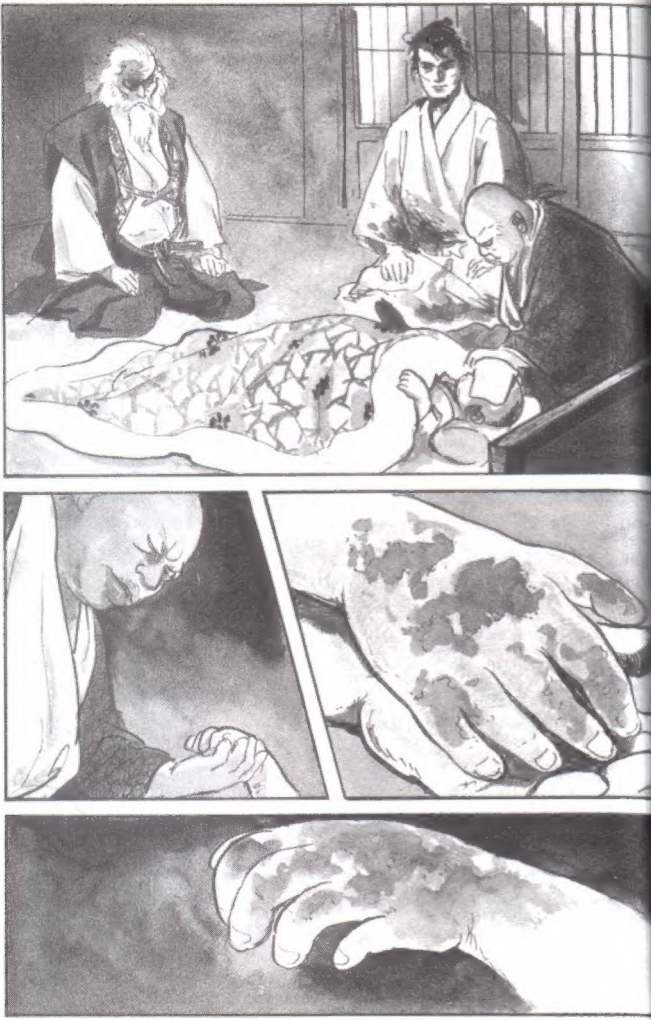
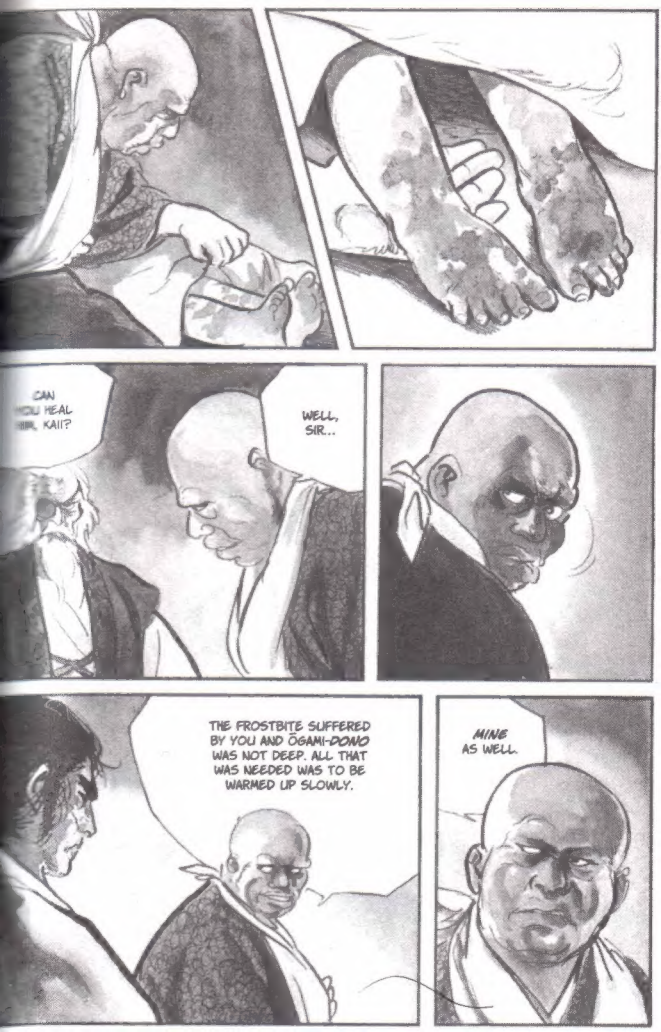
the hundred and eighteenth

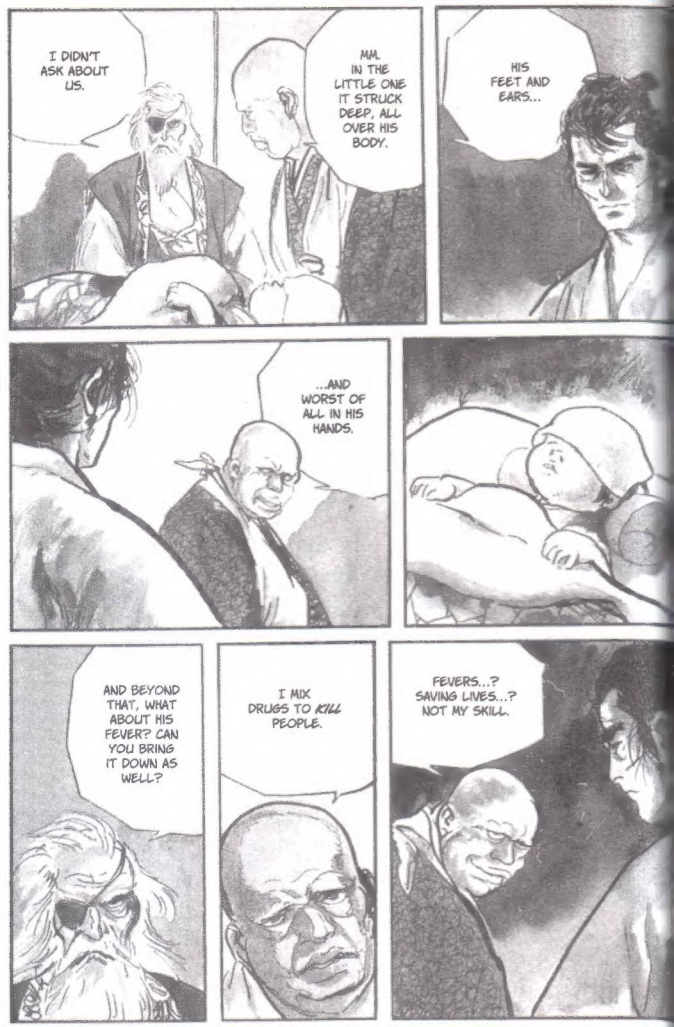
In These Small Hands





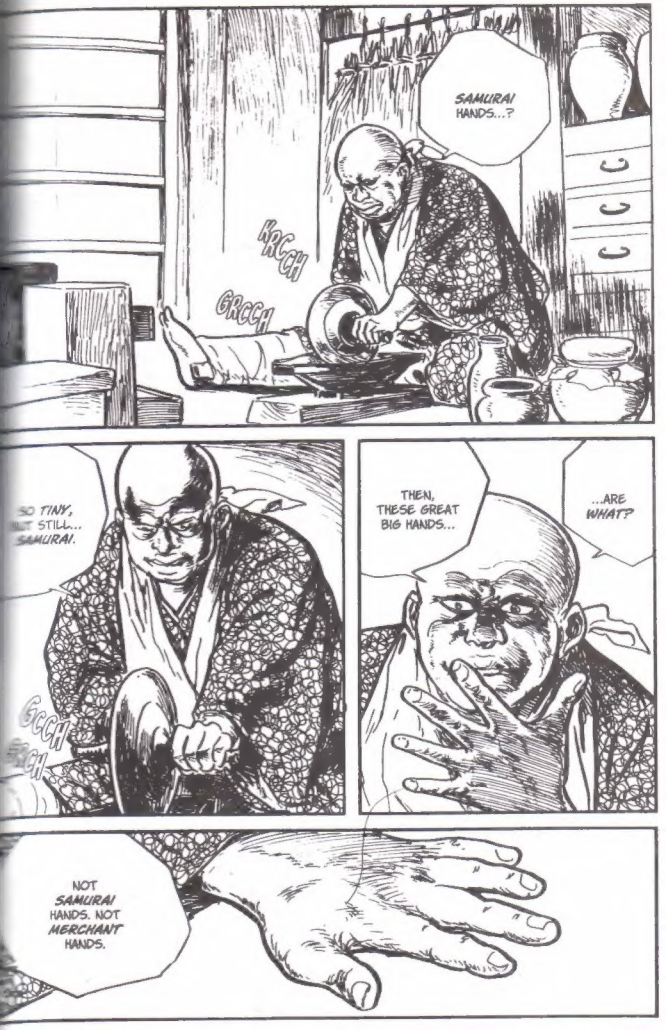


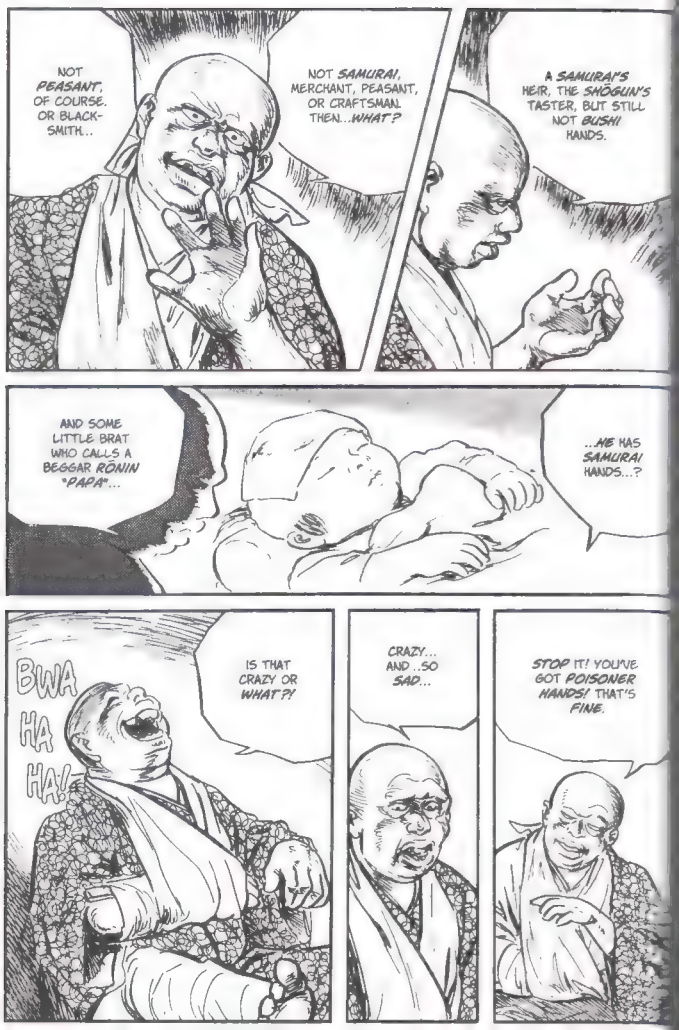

CAN YOU HEAL HIM, KAI!?
WELL, SIR...
THE FROSTBITE SUFFERED BY YOU AND ŌGAMI-DONO WAS NOT DEEP. ALL THAT WAS NEEDED WAS TO BE WARMED UP SLOWLY.
MINE AS WELL.


I DIDN'T ASK ABOUT US.
MA. IN THE LITTLE ONE IT STRUCK DEEP, ALL OVER HIS BODY.
HIS FEET AND EARS...
...AND WORST OF ALL IN HIS HANDS.
AND BEYOND THAT, WHAT ABOUT HIS FEVER? CAN YOU BRING IT DOWN AS WELL?
I MIX DRUGS TO *KILL* PEOPLE.
FEVERS...? SAVING LIVES...? NOT MY SKILL.

BUT THIS FROSTBITE... THAT I MIGHT CURE.
THESE LITTLE HANDS ARE ROTTING.
IF I SOAK THE FLESH WITH POISON, KILL THE ROT...THEN, JUST MAYBE...
BUT...
I WARN YOU, IT IS A DELICATE BALANCE! TO KILL THE ROT AND NOT THE FLESH...IT COULD BACKFIRE. FROSTBITE OR POISON... HIS FINGERS COULD DROP OFF ONE BY ONE.
YOUR WILL, ŌGAMI-DONO?
DO IT.

YOU TRUST ME THAT MUCH?
I MIGHT TRY TO HURT HIM, MM?
SMALL HANDS...YET SAMURAI HANDS.
SUCH WOULD BE HIS FATE IN BATTLE.
SAMURAI HANDS...?!
SAMURAI HANDS... FATE IN BATTLE...
NICELY PUT...YES. I SEE.
LITTLE TINY SAMURAI HANDS... NOT LIKE MINE.
BUT I WILL CURE YOU! I WILL!
LITTLE SAMURAI HANDS...THAT YOU SAMURAI CAN'T HEAL! BUT I CAN! ME ALONE!


SAMURAI HANDS...?
KRCCH
GRCCH
SO TINY, BUT STILL... SAMURAI.
GCCH
CH
THEN, THESE GREAT BIG HANDS...
...ARE WHAT?
NOT SAMURAI HANDS. NOT MERCHANT HANDS.


NOT PEASANT, OF COURSE. OR BLACK-SMITH..
NOT SAMURAI, MERCHANT, PEASANT, OR CRAFTSMAN. THEN...WHAT?
A SAMURAI'S HEIR, THE SHŌGUN'S TASTER, BUT STILL NOT BUSHI HANDS.
AND SOME LITTLE BRAT WHO CALLS A BEGGAR RŌNIN "PAPA"...
...HE HAS SAMURAI HANDS...?
BWA HA HA!
IS THAT CRAZY OR WHAT?!
CRAZY... AND ..SO SAD...
STOP IT! YOU'VE GOT POISONER HANDS! THAT'S FINE.

BUT...SAMURAI HANDS HAS A RING TO IT, NO? ONCE... JUST ONCE I'D LIKE TO HEAR THAT...
WHAT WOULD IT TAKE, HMM? I THINK I KNOW, BUT...
ENOUGH! DON'T BE STUPID! JUST FOCUS ON KEEPING THEM HAPPY.
DO EXACTLY WHAT THEY SAY.
YOU'RE IN THE TIGER'S LAIR!
BUT... BUSHI DON'T THINK LIKE THAT...
DAMN! DON'T EVEN THINK IT!

CURING THE BRAT'S HANDS IS YOUR ONLY CHANCE.
THEN THEY'LL *OWE* YOU. THEN THEY WON'T *KILL* YOU.
GCCH GCCH
FIRST YOU'VE GOT TO *LIVE!*
KCHOK
KCHOK
...?!
KCHO

KCHOK
AGH! HURTS...

KCHOK
KCH
KCHOK
NOW THAT'S AN EXECUTIONER EVERY CHOP! EVEN WOOD!

KCHOK
KCHOK
FOR HEATING BATH WATER, MAYBE?
KCHOK
KCHOK
HMM... NO MORE SHAKES, I SEE.

HEH... THE WOLF CHOPS WOOD.
VERY INTERESTING. HEH, HEH.
NOW TRY LIGHTING A FIRE!

SHRSSH
SHRSH
SHRSH

SHSSH
SHRSH
SHRSH
SHRSH
SH.SH.
SHRSH
SHSH
SHRSH

SHSH SHSH
SHSSH
SHSH SHSH
DO YOU KNOW HOW TO COOK RICE?
N...NO, SIR.
SH SHSH

NOT EVEN HOW TO RINSE IT?
??
SIR...?
SPLSSH
SKSH
SKSH

KSSH
SKSSH
KNNH
SKP

KRAAK
IS IT ODD TO SEE US COOK? MAKE FIRES?
SSSH
ENTERTAINING, KAI!? CAN'T TEAR YOURSELF AWAY?
N... NO, SIR... I...
WE KNOW HOW TO COOK AND BUILD FIRES BECAUSE WE'RE BUSHI, KAI.
HAH...?!

YOU THINK IT'S AMUSING FOR BUSHI TO DO MENIAL LABOR.
BUSHI SHOULD FIGHT—NOT DO THE WORK OF SERVANTS, OF WOMEN. YES?
. . . . . ?
BUT THEN... WHO WOULD COOK ON THE BATTLE-FIELD?
AH?!
OUR SAMURAI HANDS LET US DO THIS.
AND YOURS CAN'T. SO YOU ARE NOT BUSHI.
ALL YOU CAN DO IS MAKE POISON.

NOW GO MAKE IT!!
KILL WHAT'S CONSUMING DAIGORŌ!!
HYEE!
YEEK!
OW...

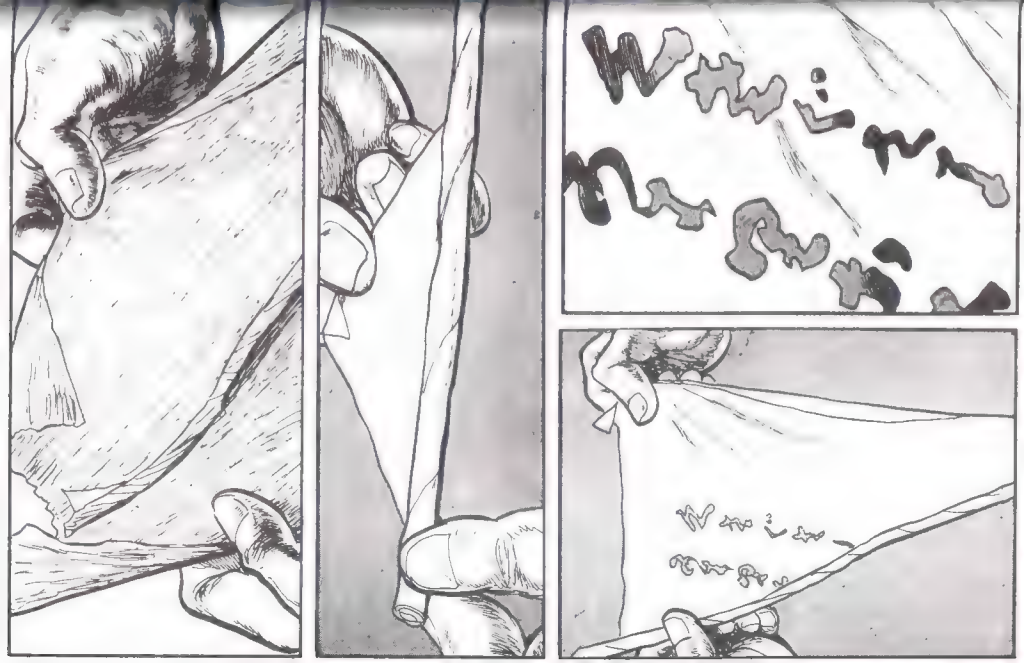
RRGG... SCARY OLD COOT.
"EYES THAT SEE THROUGH WALLS," THEY SAY. HE DAMN SURE SAW INTO MY MIND!

IT'S TRUE. I CAN'T BUILD A DECENT FIRE.
AND COOK RICE? NO WAY.
WAIT A MINUTE! THEN...THEN THE SHŌGUN AND DAIMYŌ AREN'T TRUE BUSHI, EITHER!
THEY CAN'T COOK!

THE SHŌGUN
AND DAIMYŌ
EAT RICE...?
HOW CAN SENSE!
I'VE GOT IT! RETSUDŌ AND ITTŌ ARE BUSHI WHO SERVE! NOT RULE!
THEY'VE GOT A RETAINER MIND. SERVANTS!
I JUST HAVE TO BE... A RULING BUSHI!
IN WHICH CASE...
...I'M JUST NOT THEIR KIND OF BUSHI.

HA HA
HA! I CAN BE A
SAMURAI! A SAMURAI
WHO BOSSES
SAMURAI!
JUST YOU
WAIT!! I'LL DO
IT! I WILL!

...AT'S
...OW, A
...DER FOR
... FEVER...
HRN...?



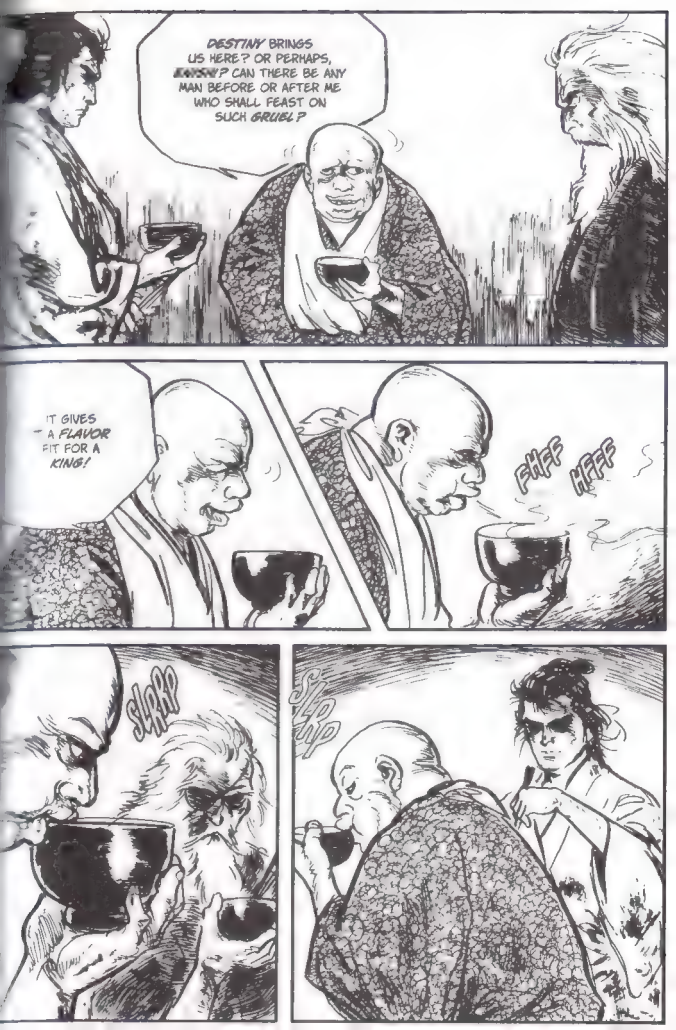
AH?!
TH-
THIS!
IT MUST
BE—

—THE YAGYŪ LETTER!

PHEWW!
INCREDIBLE... IT'S ACTUALLY IN MY HANDS!
HEH... THE GODS ARE STILL WITH ME.
HHEE!

SLRRP
KAII. YOU SEEM UNUSUALLY... HAPPY.
SLRRP
HAH...?!
YES YOU'RE GETTING VERY PLEASED WITH YOURSELF.
OH... OH, NO, SIR! I... IT'S JUST...

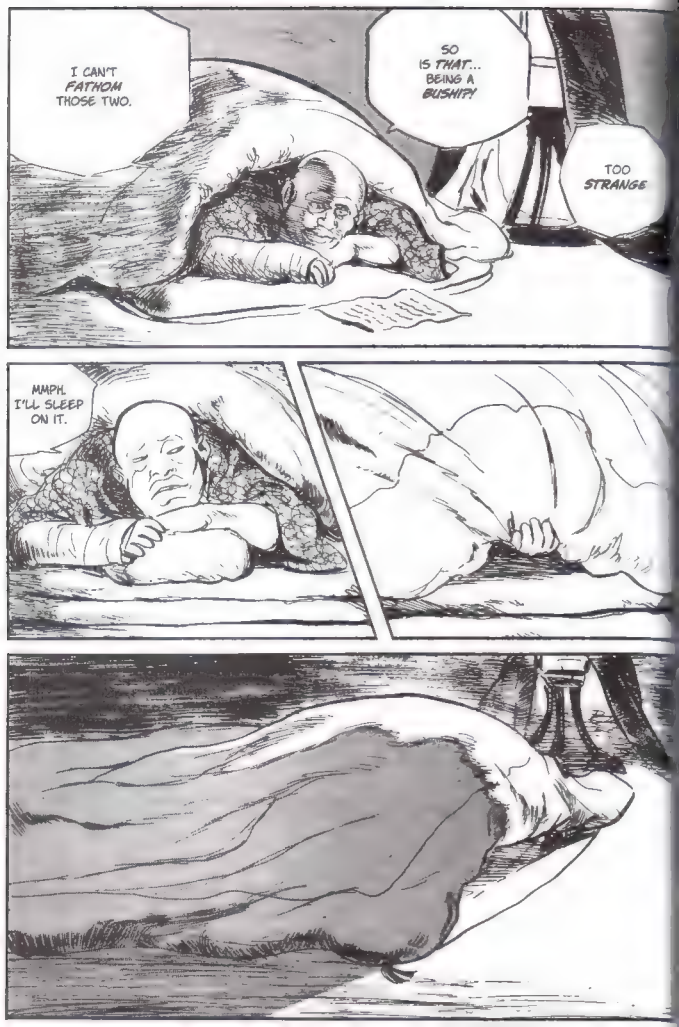
MORE RICE GRUEL...?
AH...Y-YES, SIR! MUCH APPRECIATED SIR!
ŌGAMI-*DONO* BUILDS THE FIRE... RETSUDŌ-*SAMA* MAKES THE GRUEL... AND I MERELY *PARTAKE*...
I'M NOT *WORTHY*...I'M *REALLY* NOT! SEE HOW MY *HANDS* ARE SHAKING...


DESTINY BRINGS US HERE? OR PERHAPS, KISMET? CAN THERE BE ANY MAN BEFORE OR AFTER ME WHO SHALL FEAST ON SUCH GRUEL?
IT GIVES — A FLAVOR FIT FOR A KING!
FHFF HFFF
SLRP
SLRP

A SECRET DOCUMENT, WRITTEN WITH... WORM LETTERS?
AMAZING... JUST AMAZING. AND THE CONTENTS— SHOCKING!
BUT... WHAT KIND OF WORM?
THESE TRACES... THEY LOOK FAMILIAR... I'VE SEEN THEM SOMEWHERE...

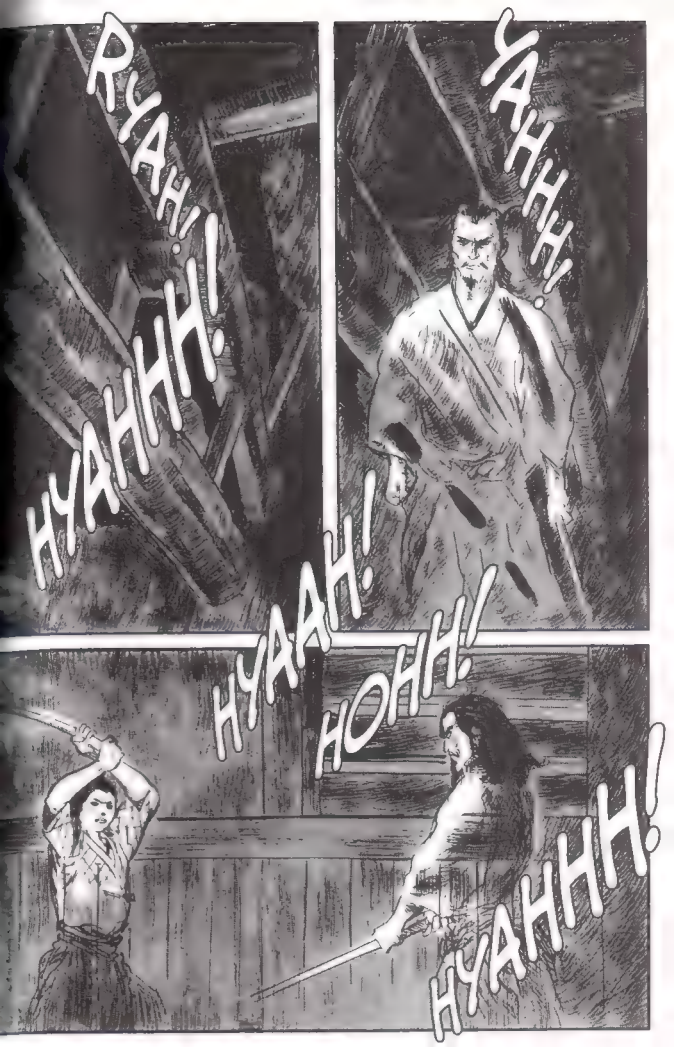
SILKWORMS! THAT'S IT! I'VE SEEN THESE MARKS ON MULBERRY LEAVES!
SO...THE YAGYŪ LETTERS ARE LEFT BY SILKWORMS, CHEWING THROUGH PAPER?
HEE HEE HEE HEE!
WHEE HEE HEE! APRIL! ALL THE DAIMYŌ, HERE IN EDO FOR SANKIN KŌTAI!
YES! IF I REVEAL THIS LETTER THEN...
RETSUDŌ STRUCK DOWN— TOPPLED! CUTTING HIS STOMACH!

JUST LIKE THAT. I'M THE POWER BEHIND THE THRONE! THE GODS WORK IN MYSTERIOUS WAYS...? YOU SAID IT!
YEE HEE HEE!
WAIT...?!
ŌGAMI ITTŌ HAD THIS ALL ALONG! SO WHY...?
HE HAD THE POWER OF LIFE AND DEATH OVER RETSUDŌ. SO WHY? HE DIDN'T NEED TO FIGHT!
I DON'T GET IT!
IT DOESN'T MAKE ANY SENSE!
FIRST THEY FIGHT TO THE DEATH, THEN THEY'RE BOSOM BUDDIES, EATING AND SLEEPING UNDER THE SAME ROOF.


I CAN'T FATHOM THOSE TWO.
SO IS THAT... BEING A BUSHIP?
TOO STRANGE
MMPH. I'LL SLEEP ON IT.

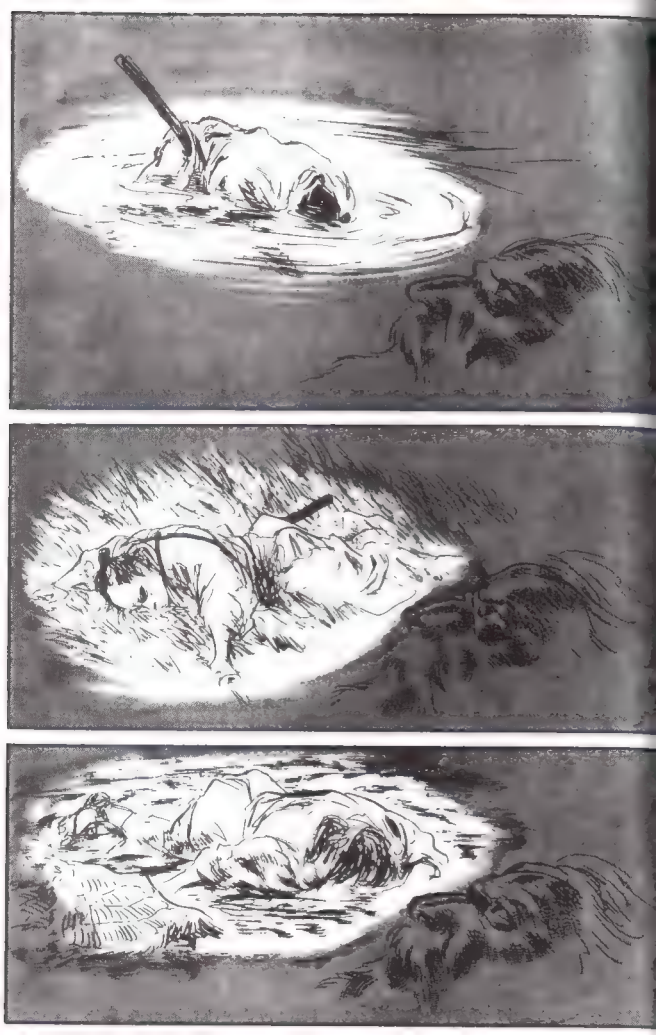
大悟

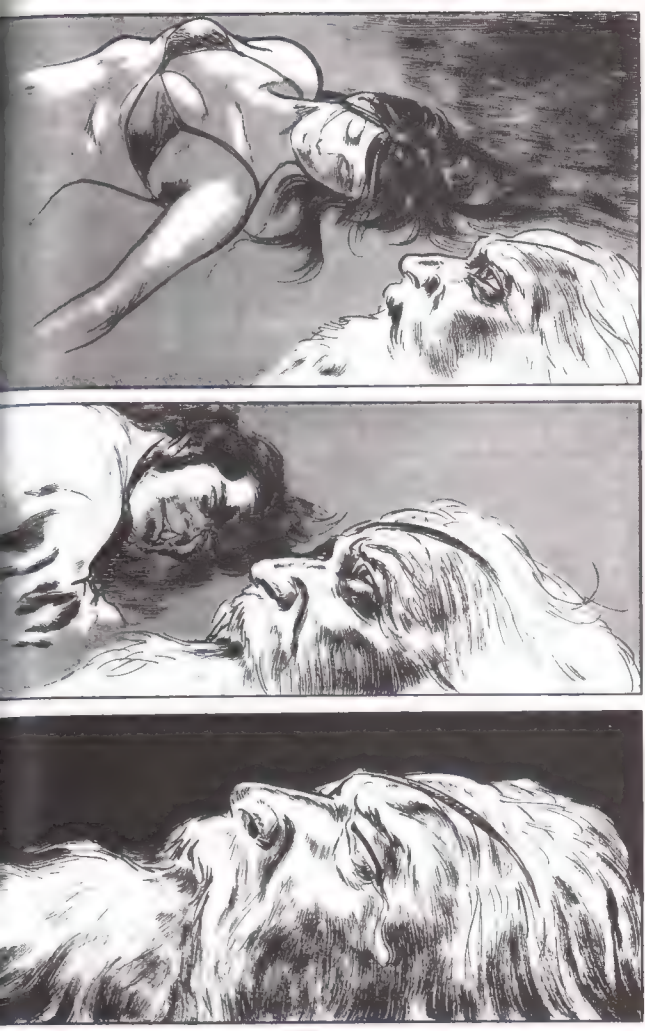
HYAAH!
RYAHH!
HOHH!


RYAH!
HYAHHH!
YAHHH!
HYAAH!
HOHH!
HYAHHH!

YAHH
BYAHH!
HYAHHH!
YOHHH!

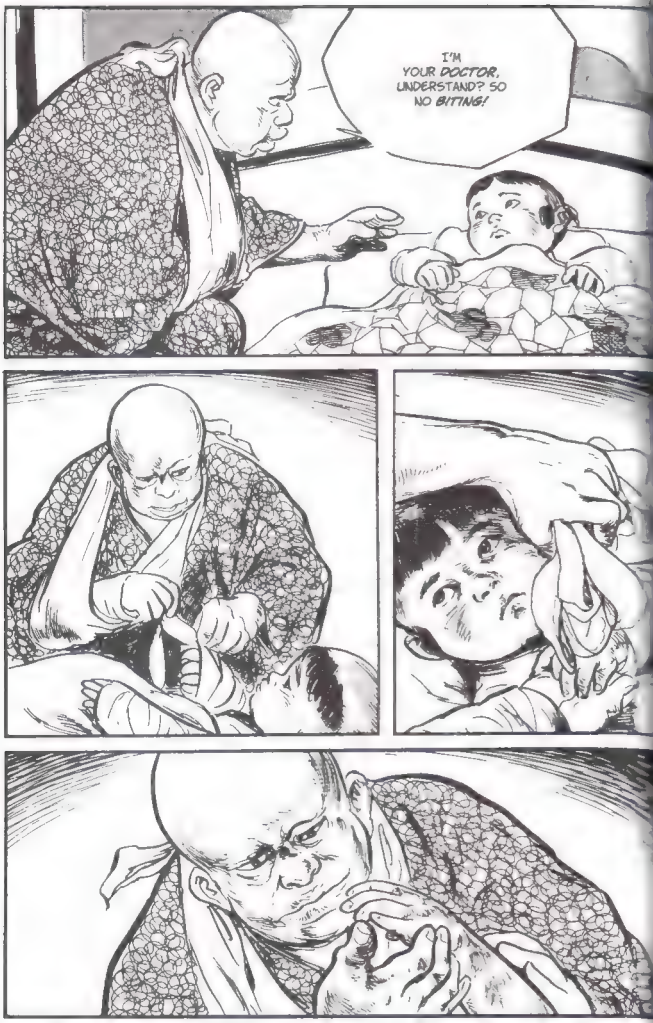
HYAH!
RYAHHH!
HOHH!





KRNCH
GYAHH
OWW! THAT HURT!

THE FEVER'S DOWN.
BRAT!
MEAN..
CHILD.
OWW!!
AND THE FROSTBITE ...?


I'M YOUR DOCTOR, UNDERSTAND? SO NO BITING!

THEY'LL BE JUST FINE.
YOU CAN RELAX, ŌGAMI-DONO.
OH, NO, NO! FORGET IT!
SO...IF YOU DON'T NEED ME ANY MORE...CAN I GO?
I MEAN... YOU WOULDN'T KILL ME?
I'M NO BUSHI. RIGHT, RETSUDŌ-SAMA?

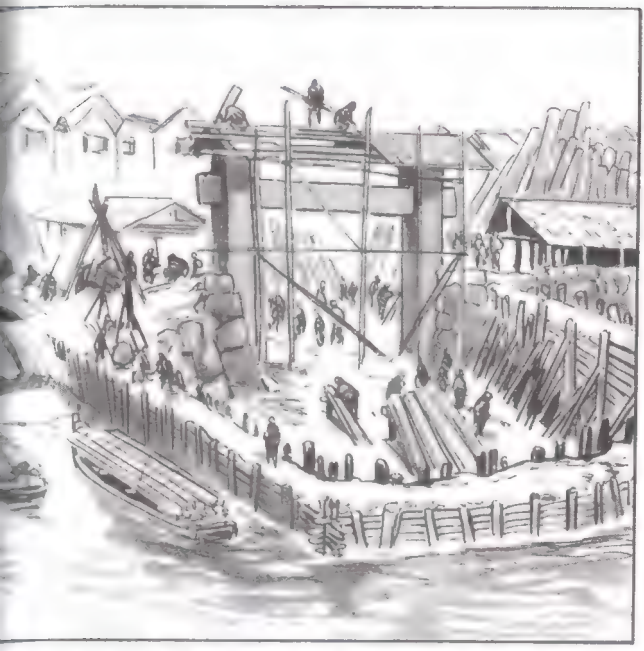
YOU SAID IT'D FOUL YOUR SWORD TO KILL ME, HUH?
SO YOU WON'T MIND ME LEAVING...?
NEVER BOTHER US AGAIN
SERVE OUR LORD AS HIS TASTER.
UNDER-STAND?!
YES S
DON'T FORGET I HAVE YOUR CONFESSION, WRITTEN IN BLOOD.
I WON'T!

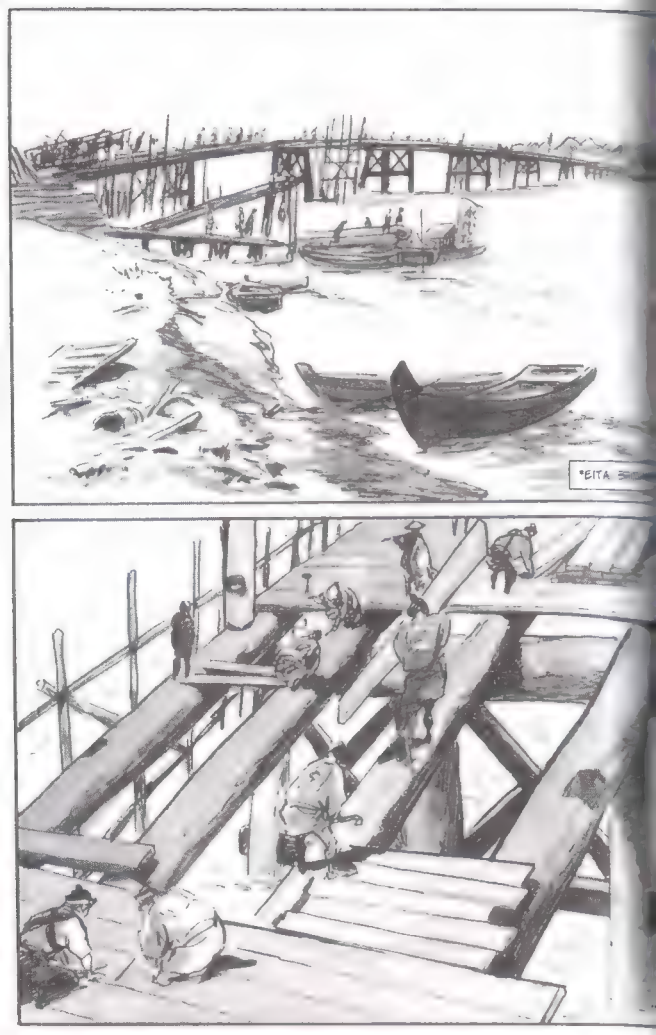
NO MORE CRAZED AMBITION, KAI!
NOT IF YOU VALUE YOUR LIFE!
KNNK
YAAAAIIIEEE!!

AHHHH!
THOKKA
THOKKA
HEE HEE...
HEE HEE
HA HA HA!!
BWA HA HA

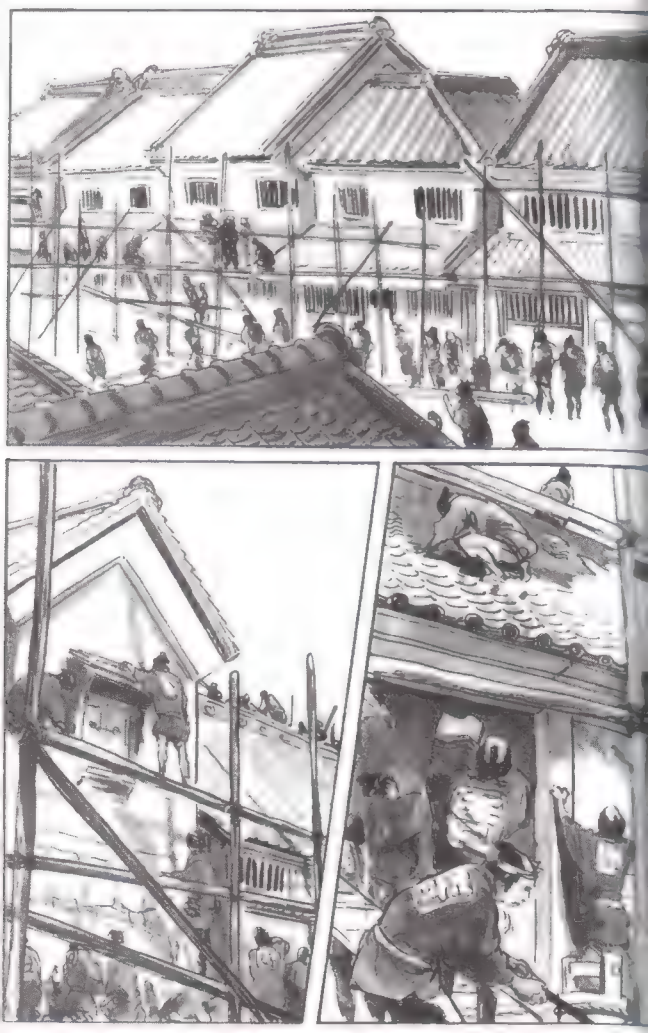
the hundred and nineteenth

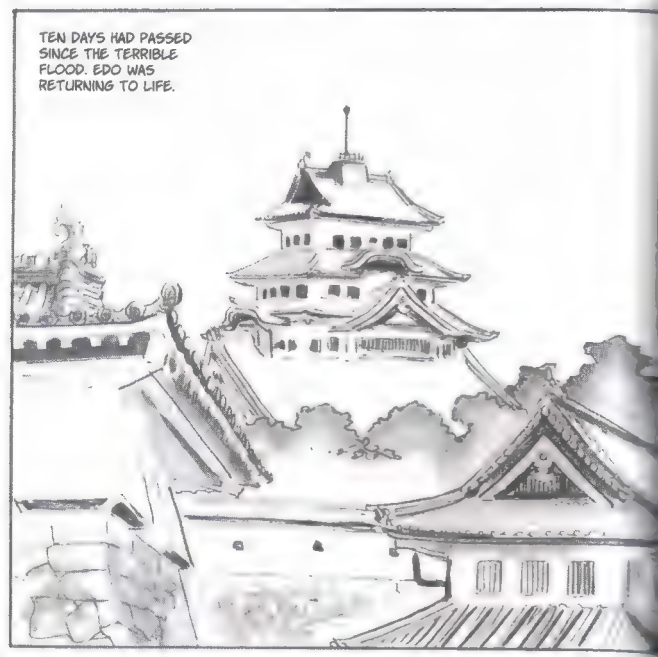
Kaii Triumphant

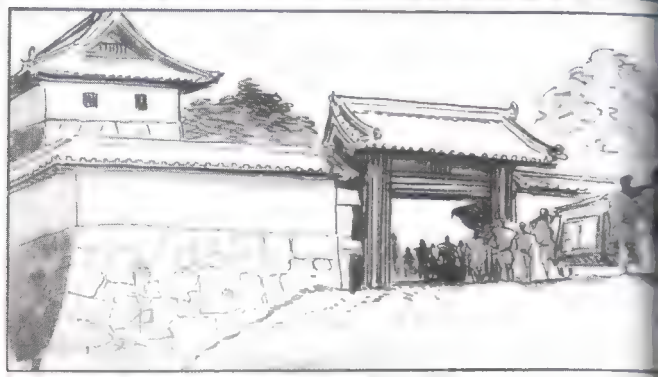


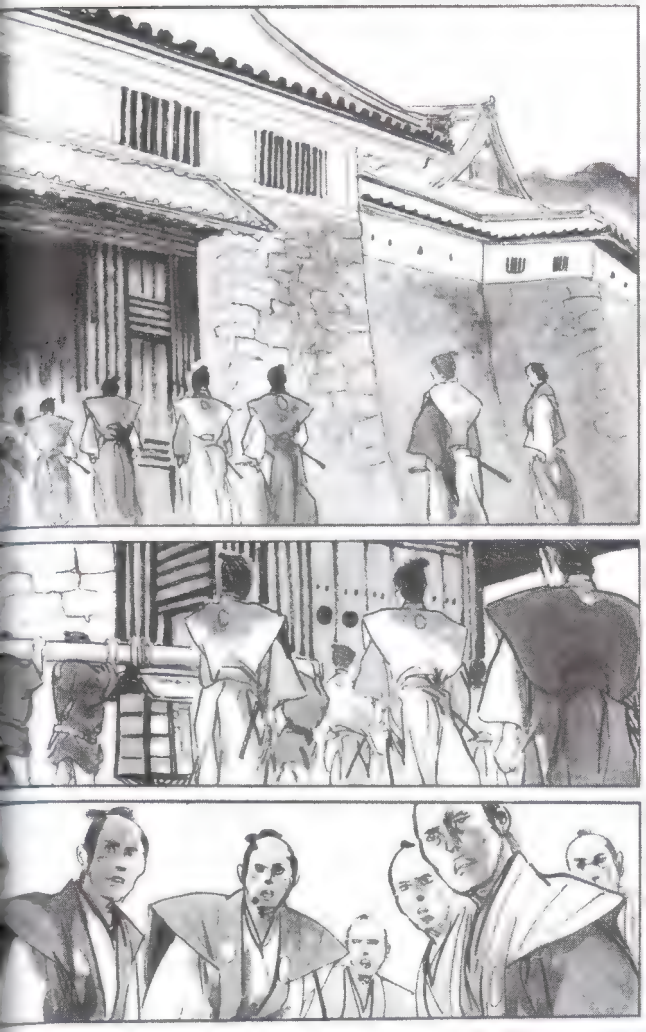


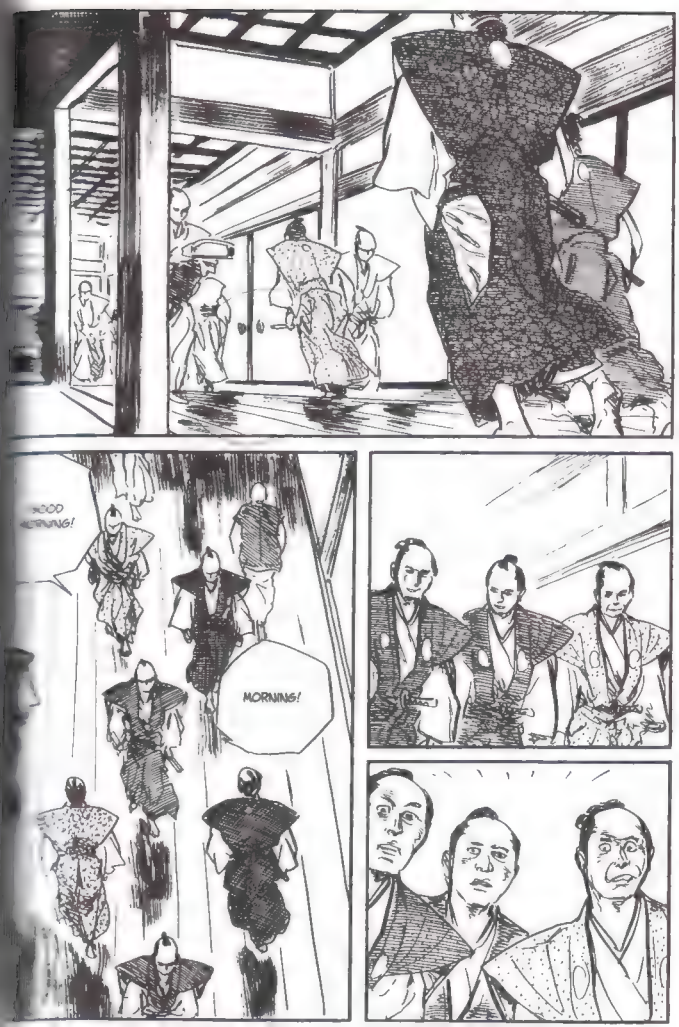
兩國橋
*RYOGOKU BRIDGE CONSTRUCTION BUSYŌ

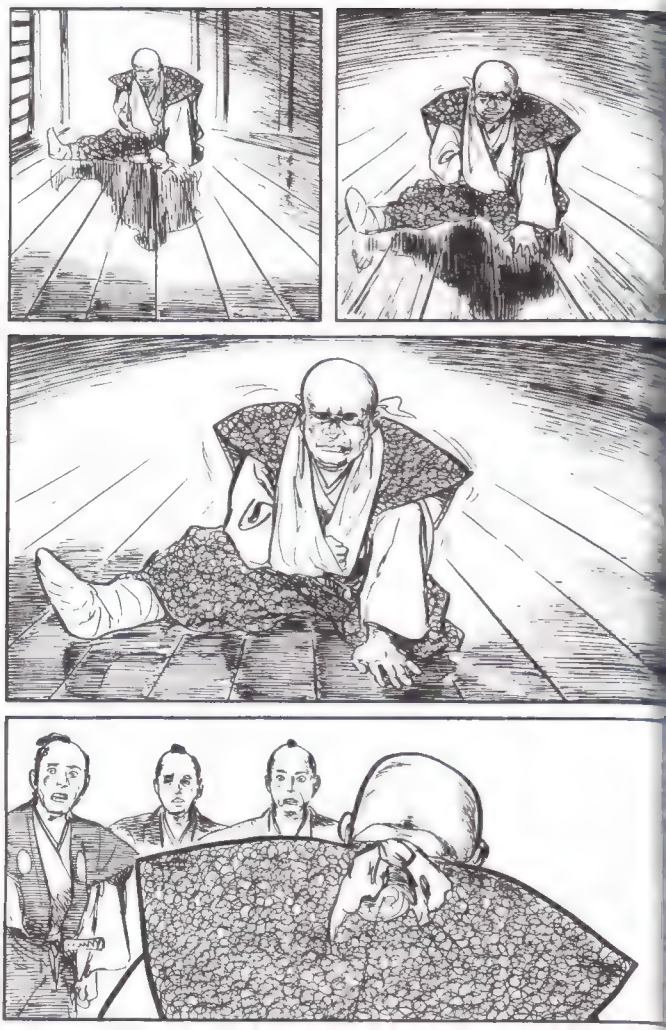



TEN DAYS HAD PASSED
SINCE THE TERRIBLE
FLOOD. EDO WAS
RETURNING TO LIFE.



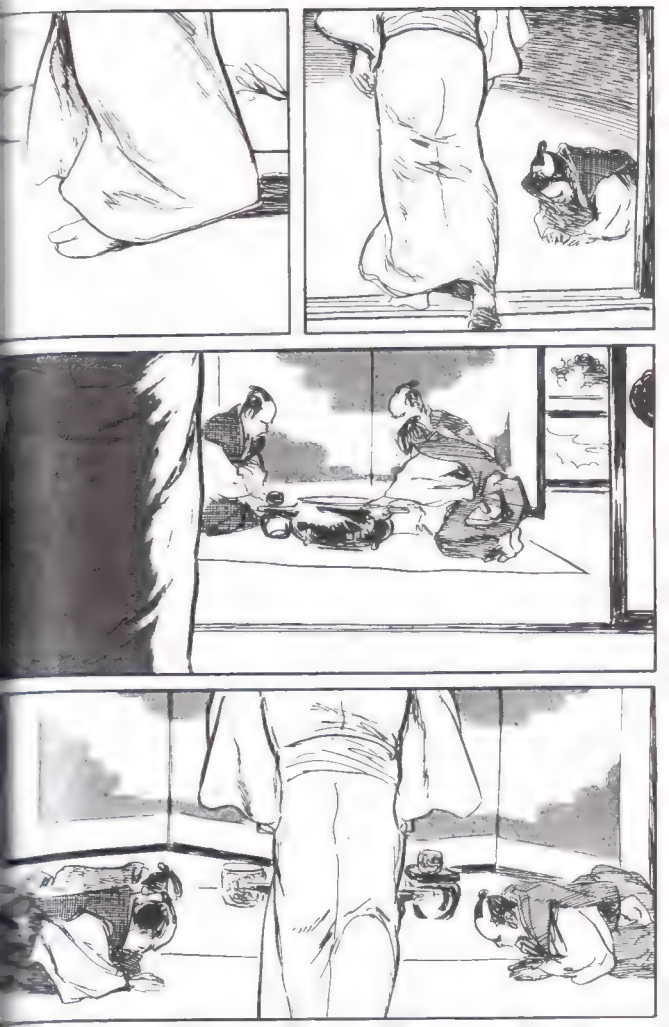


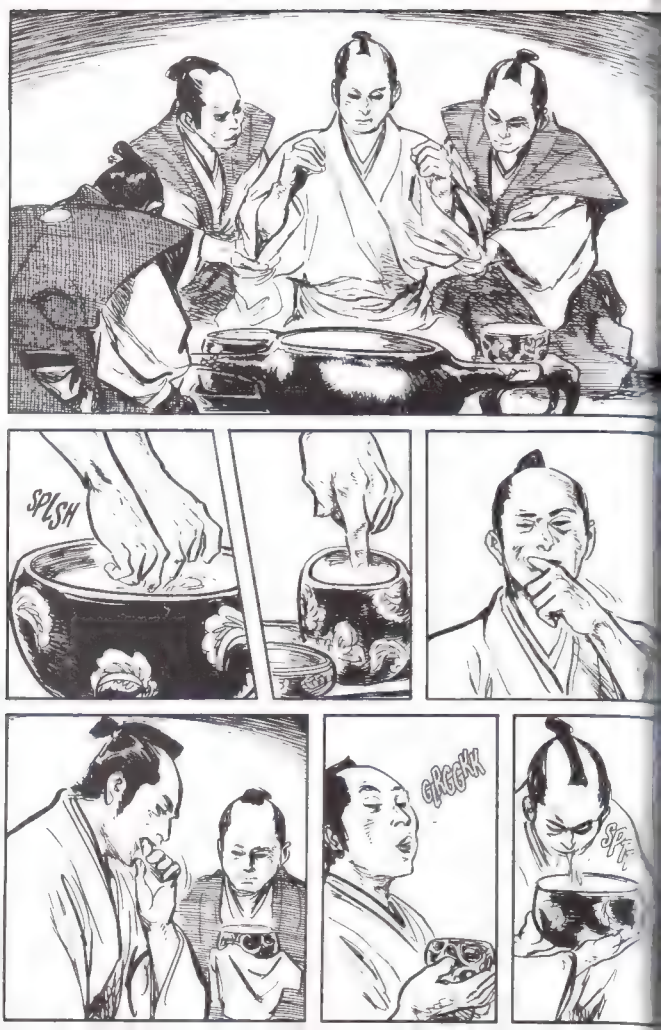

GOOD MORNING!
MORNING!



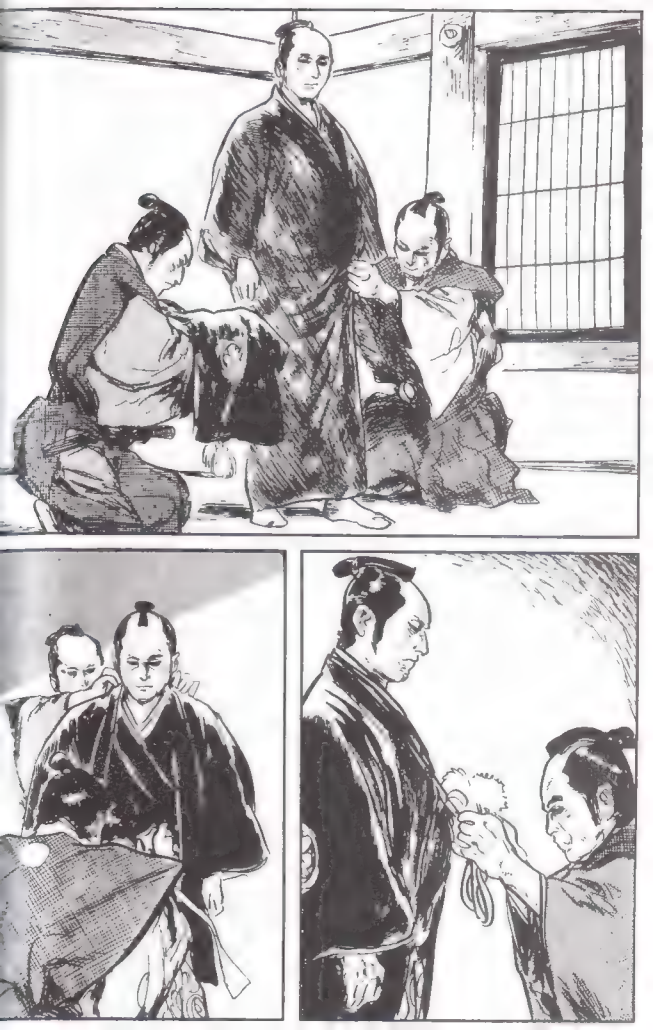
AH...! O-KUCHIYAKU-SAMA...?
S-GOOD ORNING, SIR!
HRMF!

MOHH!
MOHHH!




SPLSH
GLGGKK
SPIT

AREN'T YOU...
...ABE-SAMA?!
IT'S TIME FOR OUR LORD TO DRESS. GO AND DO YOUR DUTY!
EX-EXCUSE US!

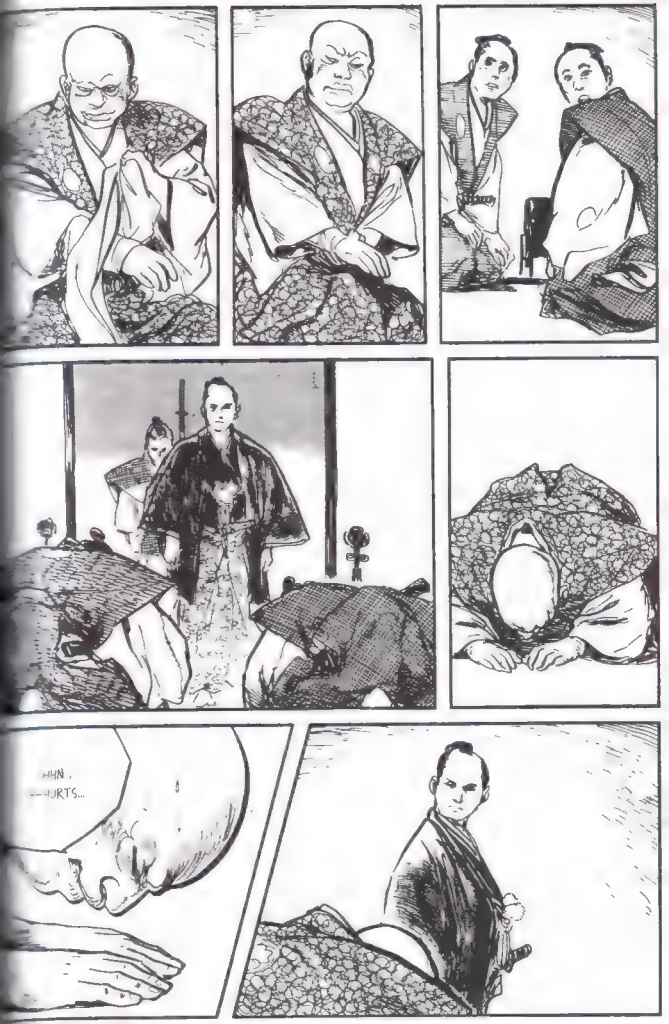


GOOD MORNING, SIR.
OH! ABE... DONO?

K-ABE-SAMA...?!
GOOD MORNING, SIR.
RRM!

NNG!
NNG...
KRAK

AHRG!
AUHH!
HEH
HEH!
NNF...
OW...
DAMN...
UNGG!

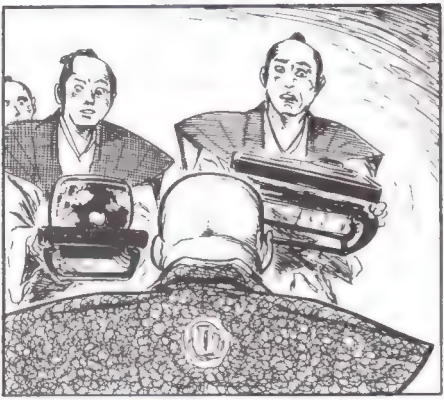

HHN.
HURTS...

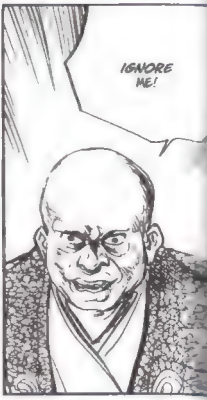
HM?! ODD...WHO IS IT?
ABE TANOSHI, MY LORD FORGIVE MY HIDEOUS ASPECT...
KAIL..? LOOK AT ME.
BWAH HAH HAH!
THAT'S TANOSHI, ALL RIGHT.
HEH, HEH..
AH HA HA HA!

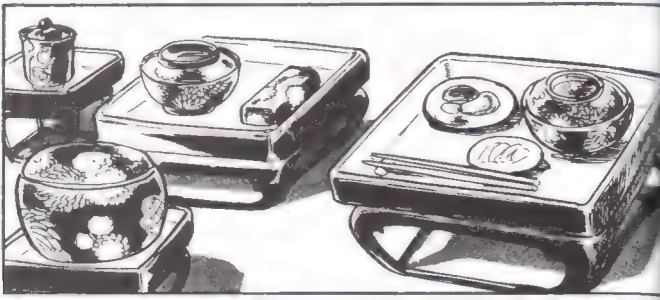
HA HA HA!
MY LORD... TO FACE ŌGAMI ITTŌ REQUIRES STRATEGY.
I DRESSED AS A MONK TO GET CLOSE TO HIM...
AND? YOU BURIED HIM?!

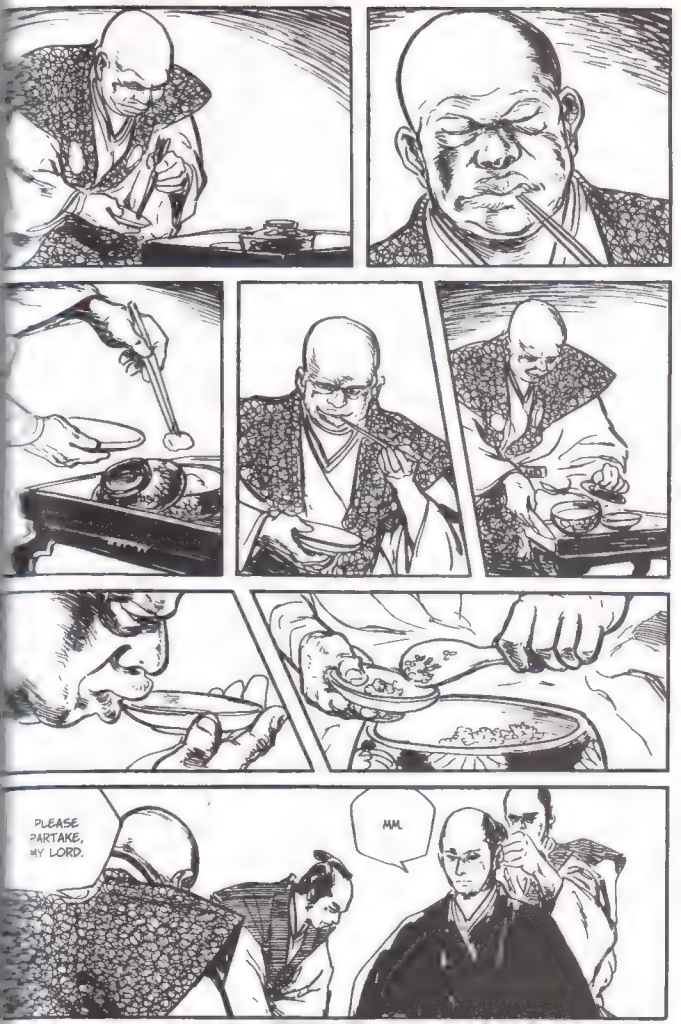
ALAS... MY LORD...
FOOL! YOU FAILED?!
I HAVE NO EXCUSE.
WHAT OF RETSUDŌ?
I WOULD SPEAK OF THAT MY LORD..
DID HE KILL ITTŌ?
NO.
SPEAK! WHAT HAPPENED?!
IN... PRIVATE, MY LORD?

...OW!
MY...MY LORD, I HAVE SHOCKING NEWS. PLEASE... FOR YOUR EARS ALONE.
THEN WAIT.
MY LORD!
...URRY UP!
MY LORD!
YOUR PULSE IS NORMAL, SIRE
YOUR HEALTH SEEMS GOOD, MY LORD.
MOHH!
MOHHH!




IGNORE ME!




PLEASE PARTAKE, MY LORD.
MM.

GOOD.

NOW LEAVE ME.

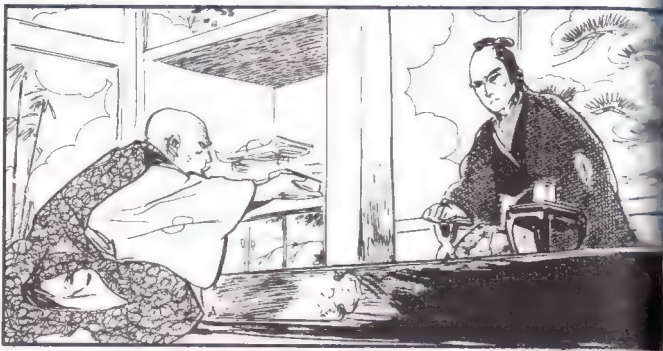
EDO CASTLE, NAKAOKU. THE SHŌGUN'S PRIVATE RESIDENCE IN THE HONMARU CENTRAL KEEP.
SPEAK. WHAT IS IT?
MY LORD...

DOES MY LORD TRUST HIS *KUCHIYAKU*, TANOSHI?

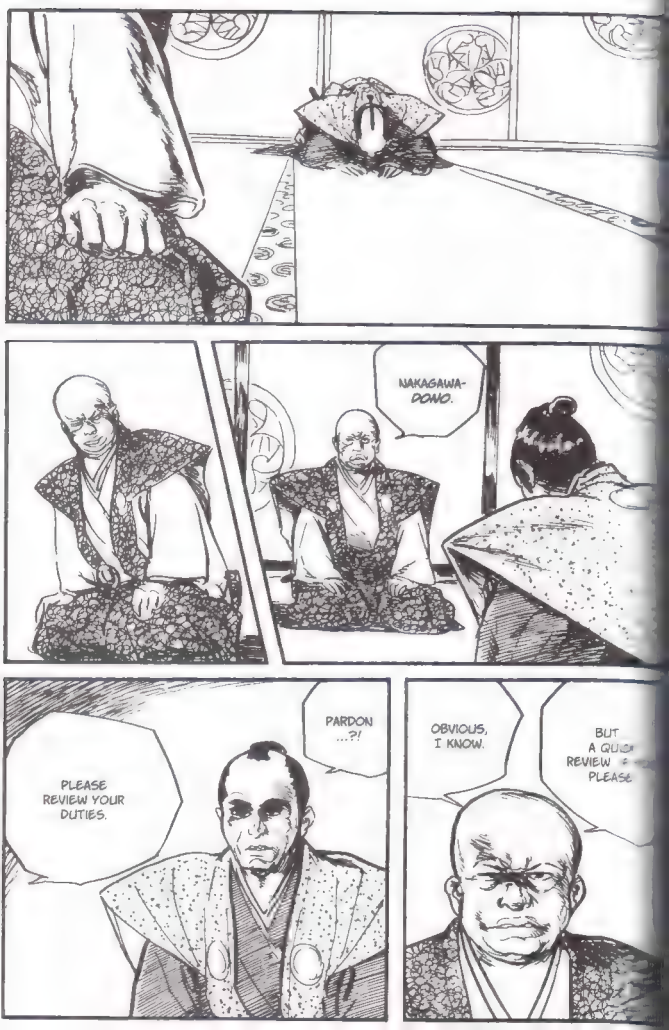
WHAT?! I CLEARED THE ROOM FOR THIS?
PLEASE, MY LORD... WAIT. YOU MAY HAVE TO WEIGH MY POOR SELF AND RETSUDŌ-SAMA UPON THE SCALES.
SO GRAVE IS MY NEWS...
HOW CAN I EAT IF I DON'T TRUST MY CUCHIYAKU?
MY LORD!

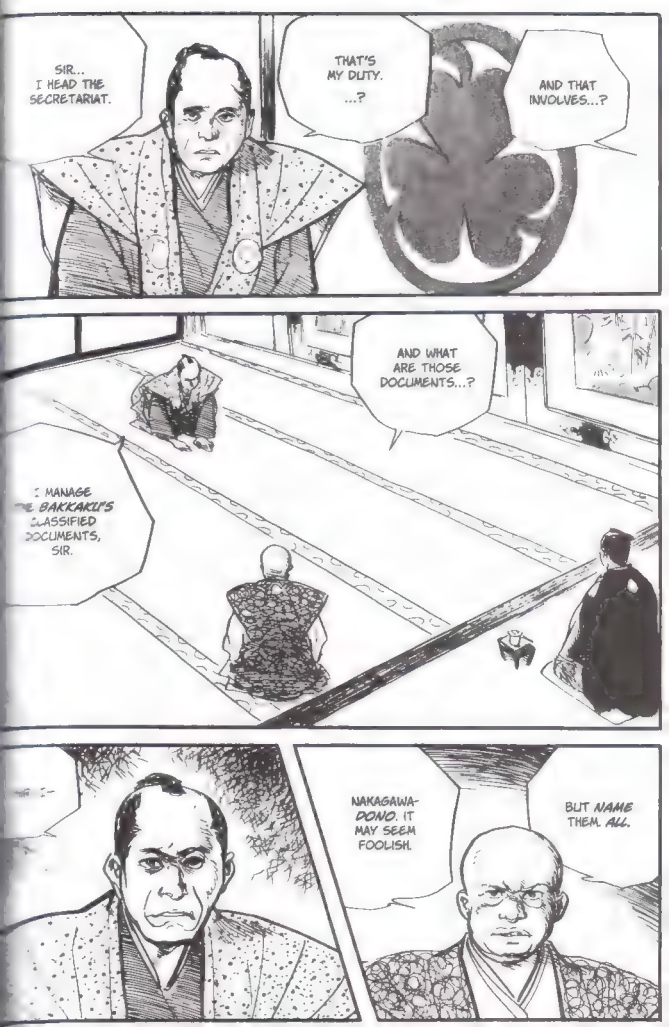
GLORY BEYOND TANOSHI'S STATION! SUCH JOY...
ENOUGH. TELL ME.

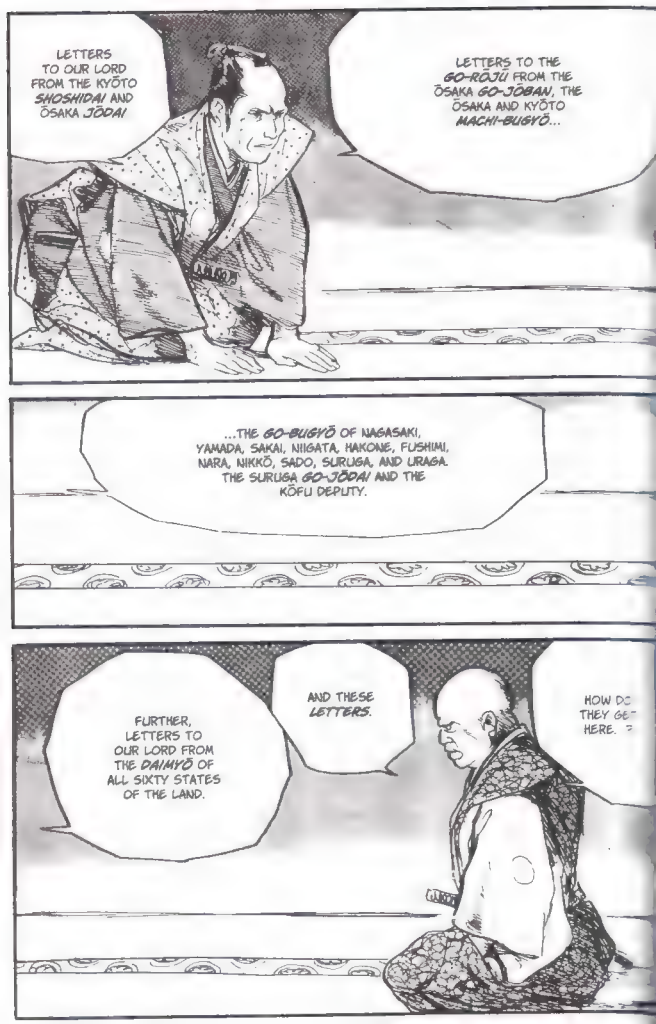
YES, MY LORD.

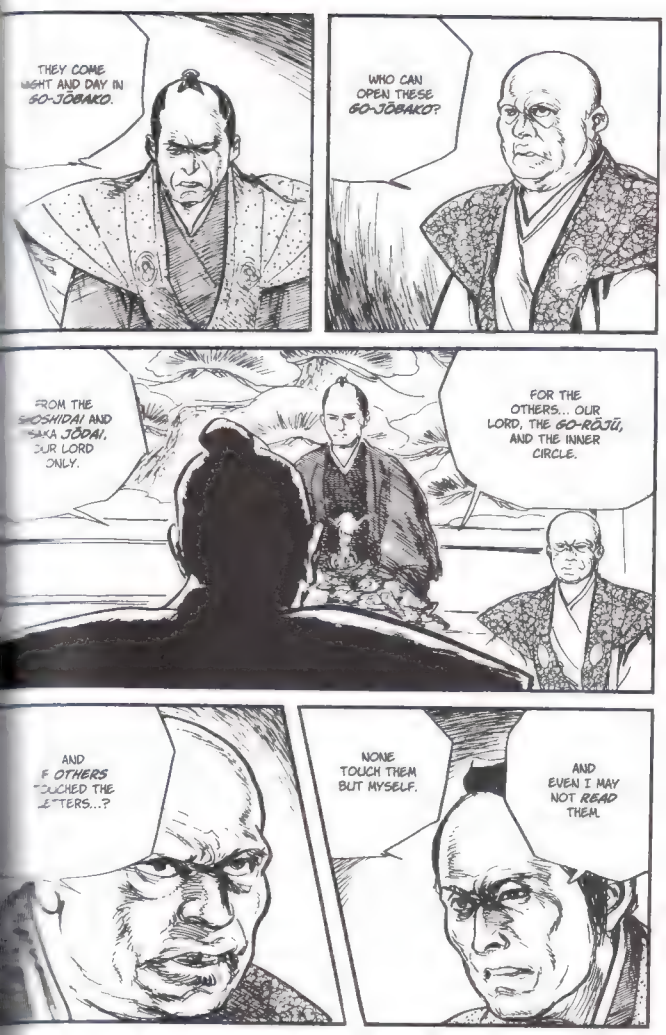


THESE ARE SILKWORMS, MY LORD.
HMM? ARE THEY ?
INDEED, MY LORD.
BUT...?!
SIRE. MIGHT YOU SUMMON YOUR CHIEF SECRETARY...
...NAKAGAWA ICHIBEI?


NAKAGAWA-DONO.
PARDON ...?!
PLEASE REVIEW YOUR DUTIES.
OBVIOUS, I KNOW.
BUT A QUICK REVIEW PLEASE.

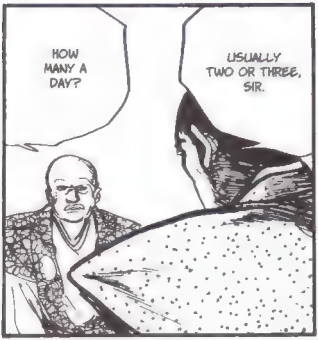

SIR...
I HEAD THE SECRETARIAT.
THAT'S MY DUTY.
...?
AND THAT INVOLVES...?
AND WHAT ARE THOSE DOCUMENTS...?
I MANAGE BAKKAKU'S CLASSIFIED DOCUMENTS, SIR.
NAKAGAWA-DONO. IT MAY SEEM FOOLISH.
BUT NAME THEM. ALL.


LETTERS TO OUR LORD FROM THE KYŌTO SHOSHIDAI AND ŌSAKA JŌDAI
LETTERS TO THE GO-RŌJŪ FROM THE ŌSAKA GO-JŌBAN, THE ŌSAKA AND KYŌTO MACHI-BUGYŌ...
...THE GO-BUGYŌ OF NAGASAKI, YAMADA, SAKAI, NIIGATA, HAKONE, FUSHIMI, NARA, NIKKŌ, SADO, SURUGA, AND URAGA. THE SURUGA GO-JŌDAI AND THE KŌFU DEPUTY.
FURTHER, LETTERS TO OUR LORD FROM THE DAIMYŌ OF ALL SIXTY STATES OF THE LAND.
AND THESE LETTERS.
HOW DO THEY GET HERE...?

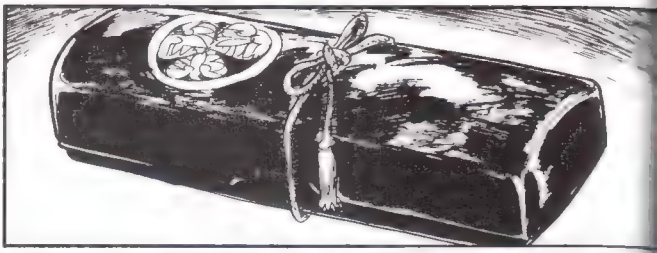

THEY COME NIGHT AND DAY IN GO-JŌBAKO.
WHO CAN OPEN THESE GO-JŌBAKO?
FROM THE SHOSHIDAI AND OSAKA JŌDAI, OUR LORD ONLY.
FOR THE OTHERS... OUR LORD, THE GO-RŌJŪ, AND THE INNER CIRCLE.
AND IF OTHERS TOUCHED THE LETTERS...?
NONE TOUCH THEM BUT MYSELF.
AND EVEN I MAY NOT READ THEM.

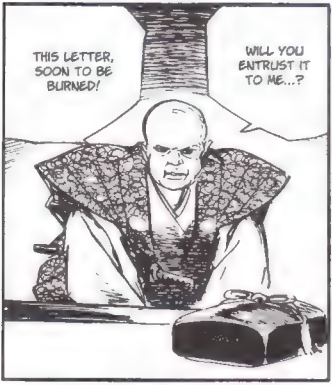
NOW THEN,

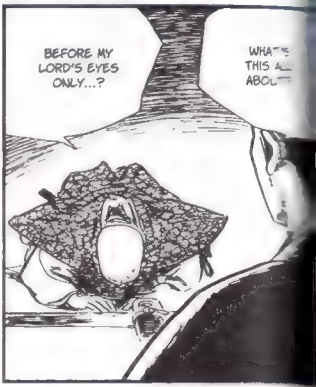
EXPLAIN HOW YOU MANAGE AND STORE THEM.
ANY LETTER NOT FILED IS JOURNAL. I RECORD THE SENDER AND DATE.

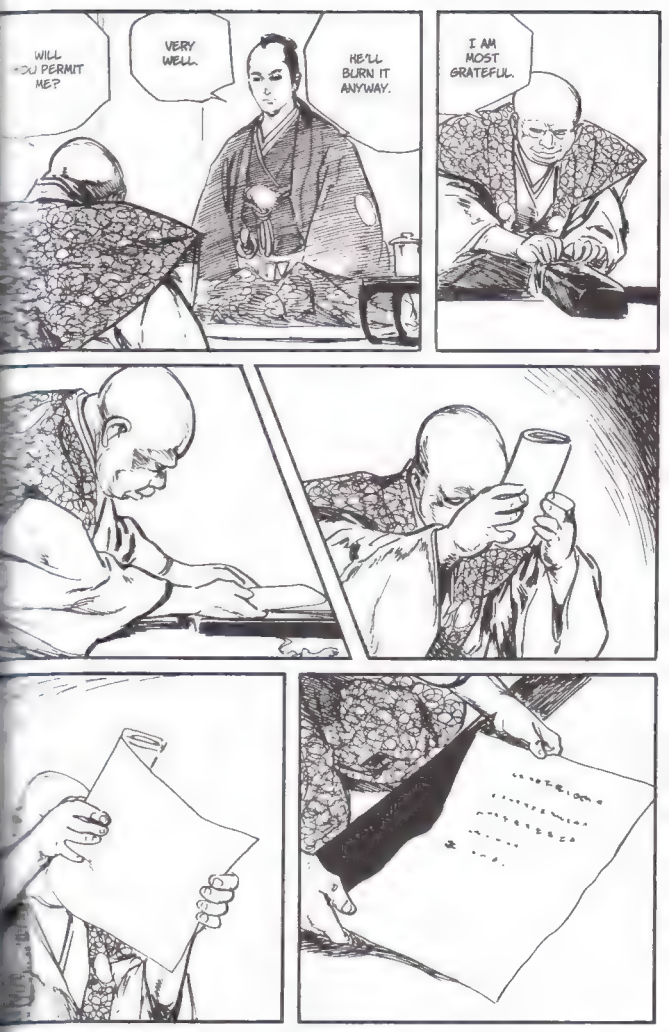

HOW MANY A DAY?
USUALLY TWO OR THREE, SIR.

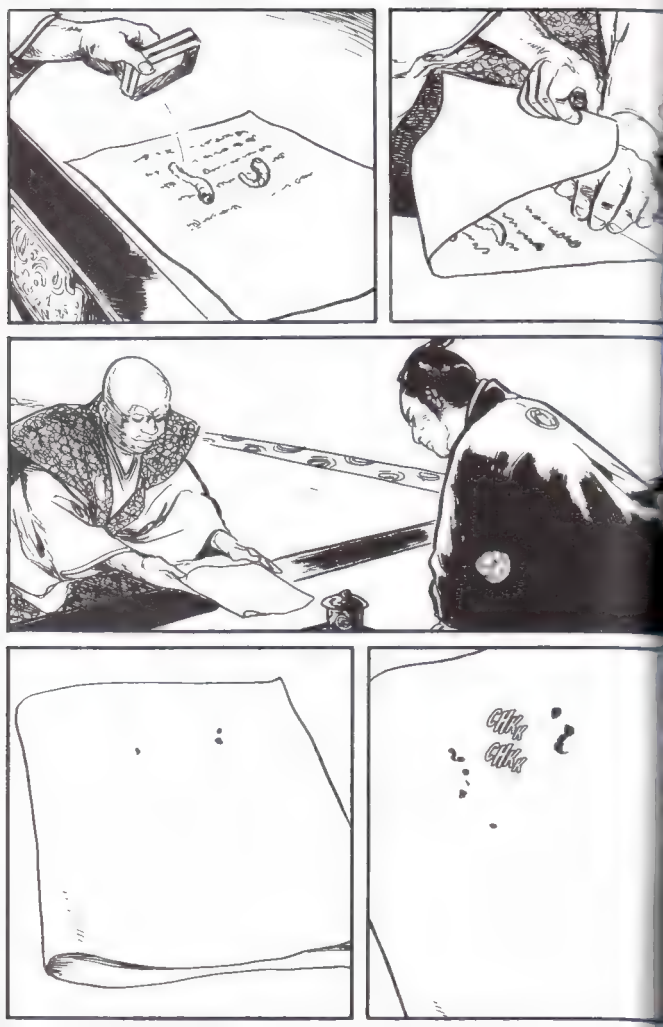
FORGIVE ME.
DID MY LORD READ YESTERDAY'S LETTERS?
I DID.
I HUMBLY ASK THAT ONE BE BROUGHT.
NAKAGAWA. THE OSAKA JŌDAI'S LETTER.
MY LORD.



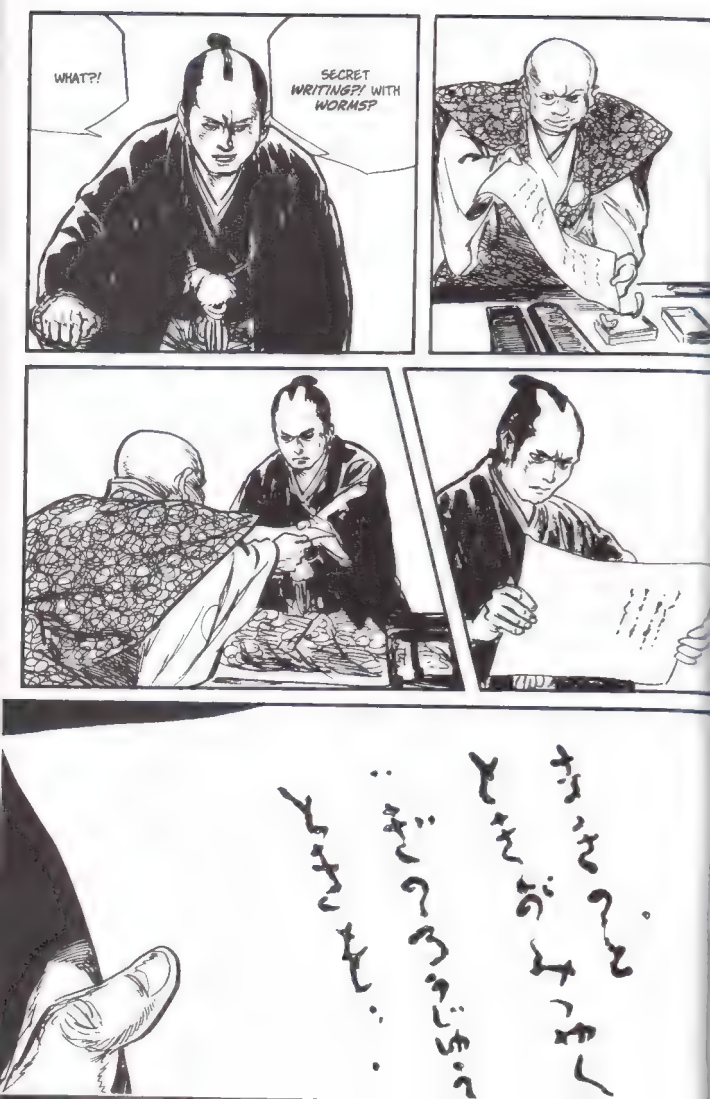

THIS LETTER, SOON TO BE BURNED!
WILL YOU ENTRUST IT TO ME...?


BEFORE MY LORD'S EYES ONLY...?


WILL YOU PERMIT ME?
VERY WELL.
HE'LL BURN IT ANYWAY.
I AM MOST GRATEFUL.


Clks
Clks

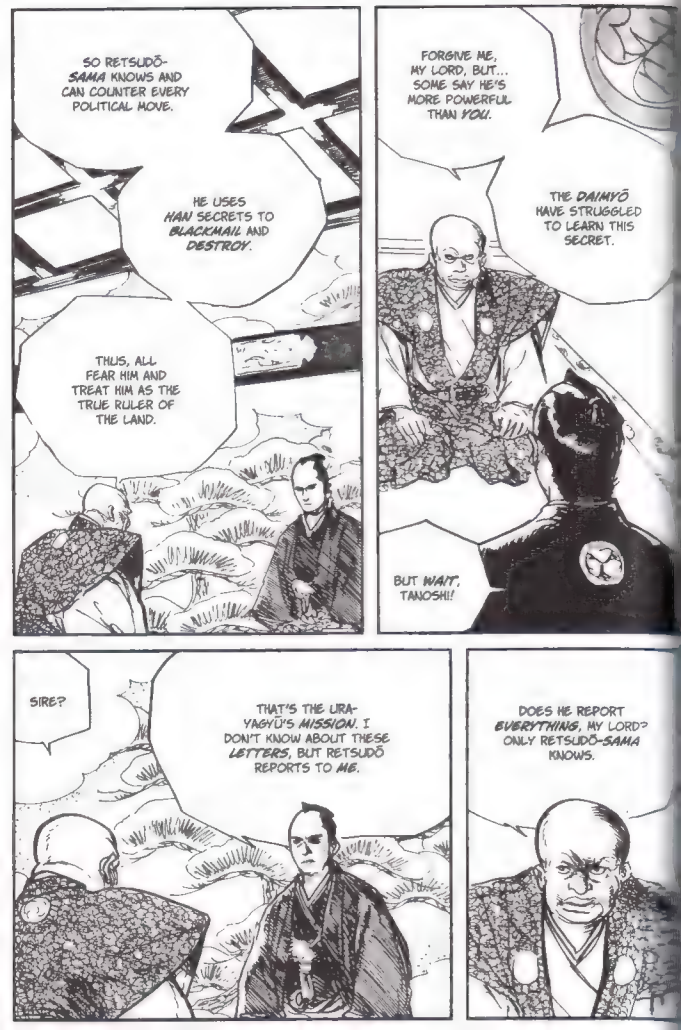
MY LORD, THERE HAVE BEEN MANY SECRET SCRIPTS IN FOREIGN LANDS AND AGES PAST. BUT LETTERS YOU FEED TO *SUKORAS* TO READ...?!
WHEN I SAW IT, EVEN I WAS STUNNED...


WHAT?!
SECRET WRITINGS? WITH WORMS?

"MAKINO TOKI MITSUYAKU GI NO RŌJŪ TOKI"...?!
WHAT IS THIS?
"MAKINO TOKI MITSUYAKU...
...GI NO RŌJŪ TOKI."
I BELIEVE IT MEANS THIS, SIR.
MAKINO! MAKINO ETSUCHŪ-NO-KAMI, WAKADOSHIYORI. TOKI! TOKI MINO-NO-KAMI, ŌSAKA JŌDAI. MITSUYAKU! SECRET PACT!
A SECRET PACT TO MAKE TOKI MINO-NO-KAMI THE NEXT GO-RŌJŪ!
HRM!

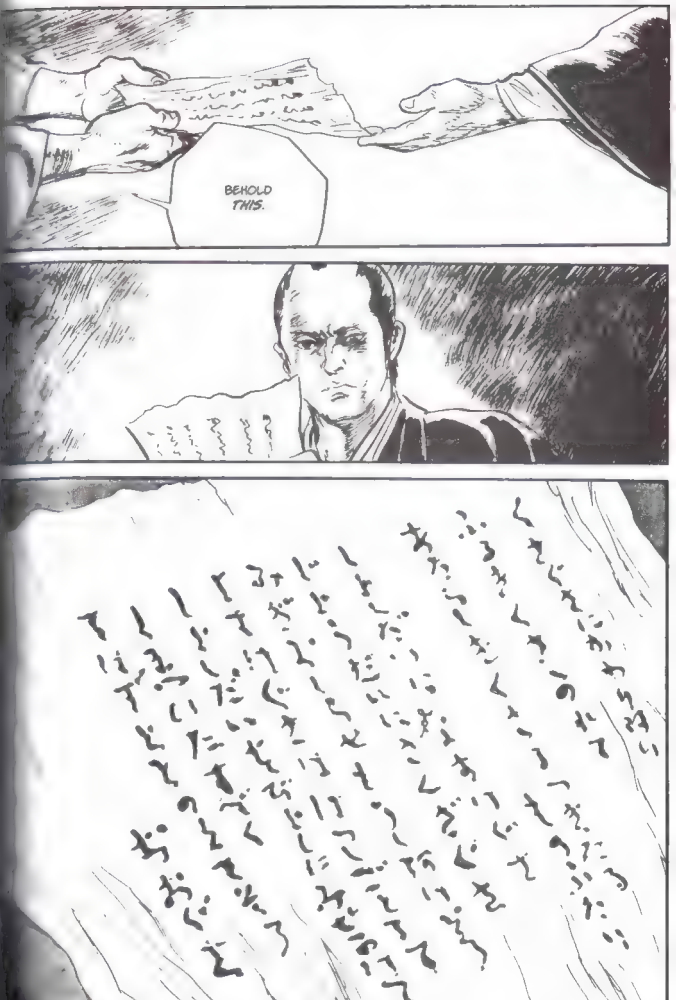
GO-JŌDAI OFTEN BECOME GO-RŌJŪ.
IT'S A BAKKAKU TRADITION. AND YET...
WHOA! WHO PUT THIS...THIS WORM WRITING THERE?!
MY LORD... IT'S A YAGYŪ FUKAIJŌ.
WHAT?! A YAGYŪ LETTER?!
THIS
LONG HAS IT BEEN WHISPERED IN THIS WORLD... THE YAGYŪ LETTERS—HE WHO FINDS THEIR SECRET CAN CONTROL THE NATION!

SO THE RUMORS SAY, MY LORD.
AND I HAVE FOUND THE SECRET AT LAST!
THE YAGYŪ PUT *NINJA* THEY CALL *KUSA*, THE *GRASS*, INTO EVERY *HAN* AND NOBLE HOUSE IN JAPAN. THEY REPORT EVERY MOVEMENT TO EDO.
IDEALLY, THOSE REPORTS SHOULD GO TO THE *GO-RŌJŪ*, AND MY *LORD*.
BUT IN FACT, ONLY *ONE* MAN SEES THEM—*RETSUDŌ-SAMA!*
RRG...!


SO RETSUDŌ-SAMA KNOWS AND CAN COUNTER EVERY POLITICAL MOVE.
HE USES HAN SECRETS TO BLACKMAIL AND DESTROY.
THUS, ALL FEAR HIM AND TREAT HIM AS THE TRUE RULER OF THE LAND.
FORGIVE ME, MY LORD, BUT... SOME SAY HE'S MORE POWERFUL THAN YOU.
THE DAIMYŌ HAVE STRUGGLED TO LEARN THIS SECRET.
BUT WAIT, TANOSHI!
SIRE?
THAT'S THE URA-YAGYŪ'S MISSION. I DON'T KNOW ABOUT THESE LETTERS, BUT RETSUDŌ REPORTS TO ME.
DOES HE REPORT EVERYTHING, MY LORD? ONLY RETSUDŌ-SAMA KNOWS.

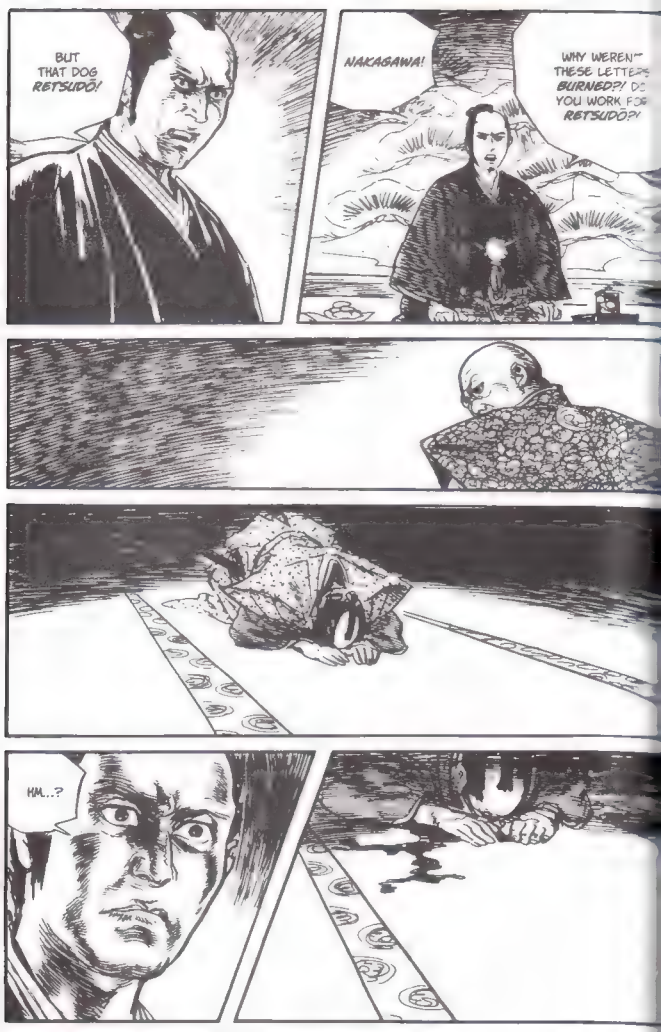
I...
I TRUST HIM AS I TRUST YOU.
THEN LET ME SPEAK.
DO TRUE RETAINERS PUT THEIR CREST ABOVE YOURS?
THIS GO-JOBAKU, THAT ONLY MY LORD SHOULD OPEN...
...THEY OPEN IT! AND SCRIBBLE THEIR PRIVATE DISPATCHES OVER MY LORD'S LETTERS WITH MULBERRY EXTRACT!

TRULY, THE YAGYŪ CREST ABOVE MY LORD'S OWN HOLLYHOCK!
CAN THEY BE MORE DISLOYAL? SHOW GREATER CONTEMPT?
HRM...!
THEY USE YOUR GO-JŌBAKU FOR THEIR OWN SECRET LETTERS. SO MUCH FASTER AND SAFER...
THE YAGYŪ PUT THEIR INTERESTS AHEAD OF MY LORD'S HOW ELSE COULD THEY EVEN CONCEIVE OF THIS?
. . . .
. . . .

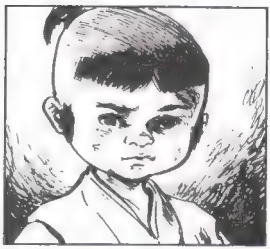

BEHOLD
THIS.

ALLOW ME: "CHANGE AMONG THE GRASS. OLD GRASS WITHERS, NEW BLADES SPRING FORTH. YOSUKE-KUSA, TO THE SHOSHIDAI. SANSA-KUSA, TO THE JŌDAI.
"AS HIS FIRST TASK, YOSUKE-KUSA WILL DISPATCH THE SHOSHIDAI, IN THE GUISE OF ILLNESS. ALL IS READY O-GUSA."
I DON'T... BELIEVE...?!
HRNG...
RRG@

THAT WAS SENT BY ITAKURA SHOSHIDAI LAST YEAR, FOUR DAYS BEFORE HE FELL ILL. FIVE DAYS LATER HE WAS DEAD. MY LORD REMEMBERS IT WELL. I AM SURE.
THEN ITAKURA! HE WAS...?
CLOSE TO MATSUDAIRA SUO-NO-KAMI-SAMA, KILLED BY A BLOW FROM RETSUDŌ'S STAFF.*
*SEE LWBC VOL. 8
AND SUO-SAMA MY LORD, WAS CLOSE TO ŌGAMI ITTŌ.
THE FUKAIJŌ IN MY LORD'S HANDS WAS STOLEN BY ŌGAMI ITTŌ. I RECOVERED IT AT GREAT RISK TO MY LIFE.
WERE I BLACK OF HEART, I MIGHT HAVE HIDDEN IT, AND FORCED THE YAGYŪ TO SURRENDER THEIR POWER TO ME.
BUT BECAUSE OF MY DEVOTION TO YOU, MY LORD...
I HAVE ALWAYS PRIZED YOUR LOYALTY, TANOSHI.

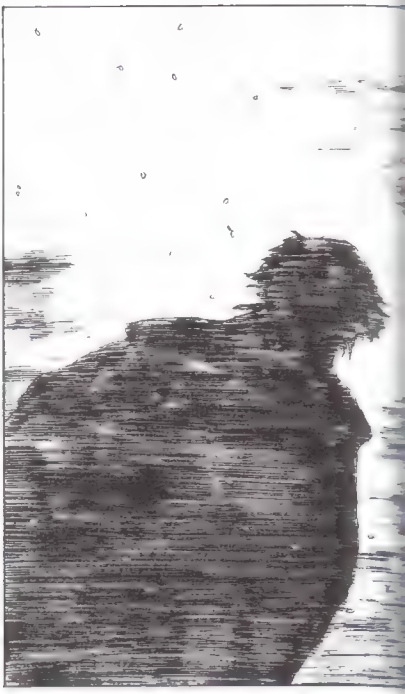

BUT THAT DOG RETSUDŌ!
NAKAGAWA!
WHY WEREN'T THESE LETTERS BURNED?! DO YOU WORK FOR RETSUDŌ?!
HM...?

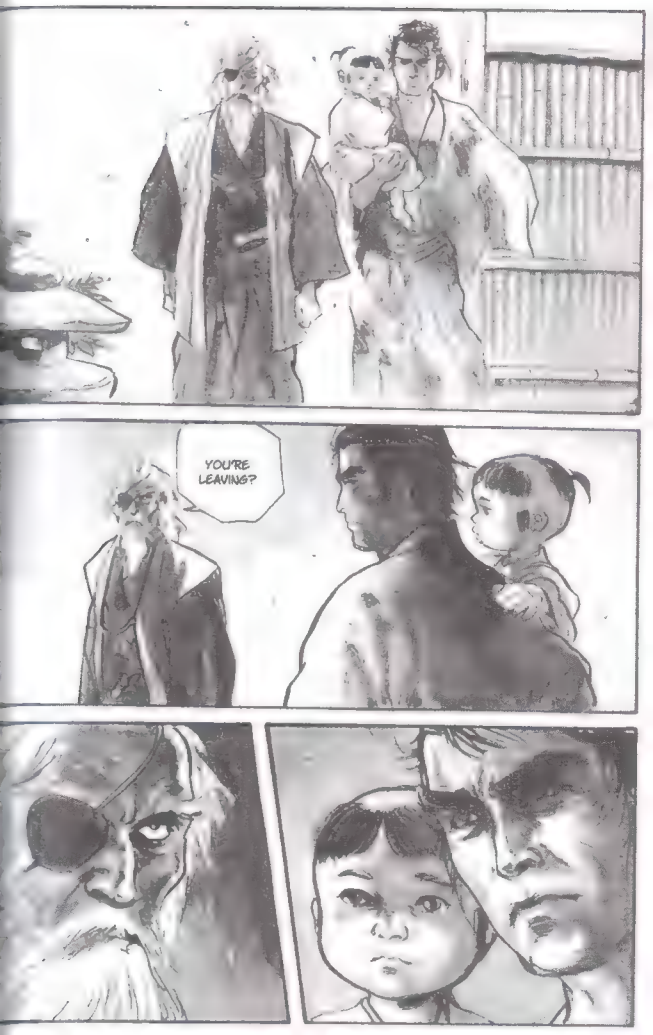
GET ME YAGYŪ RETSUDŌ!!



the hundred and twentieth

The Last Cherry Blossoms



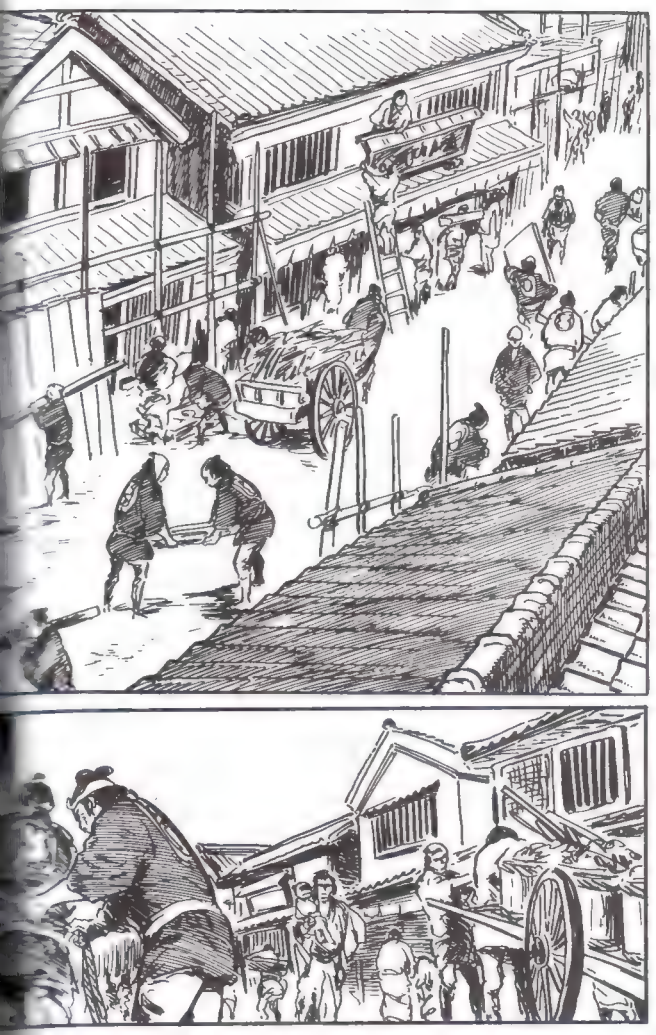

YOU'RE LEAVING?

THE LAST CHERRY BLOSSOMS... TOMORROW, GONE.
LIKE OUR DESTINIES
AND YET!
I WILL BLOSSOM IN THE SPRING, I SWEAR.

I CANNOT LOSE. NOT UNTIL I REBUILD THE YAGYŪ.
IN TWO DAYS.
WHAT HOUR?
NOON.
SO BE IT.
AGAIN.
AGAIN...

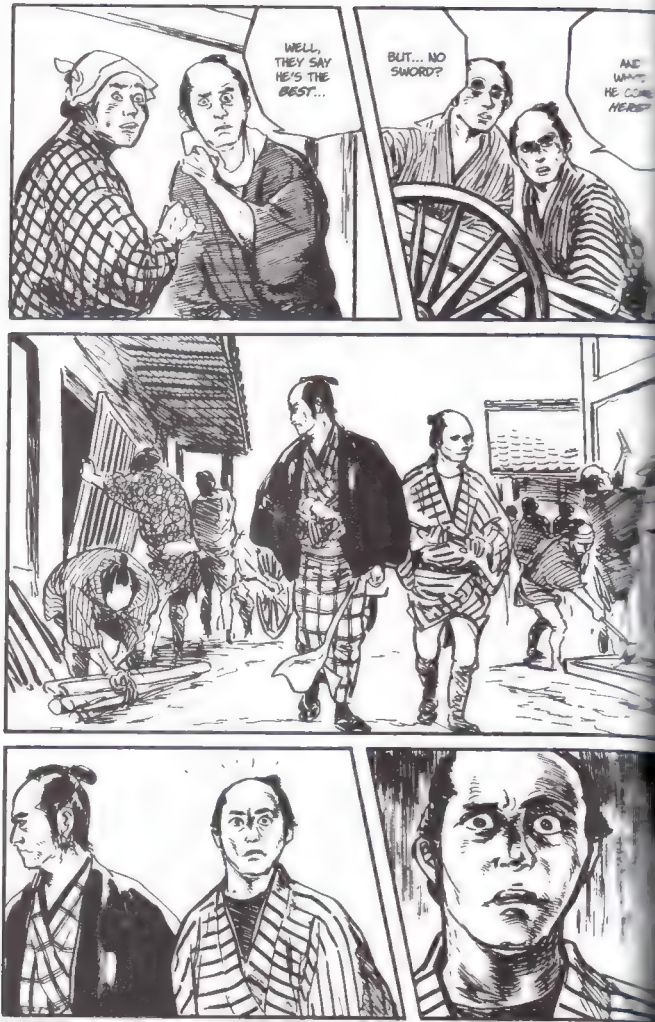
FAREWELL.
WAIT!
A YAGYŪ PASS— WALK FREE IN EDO.
TAKE -
MEIFUMADŌ HAS NO PASSES.
GETTING OLD, RETSUDŌ?
HRN!

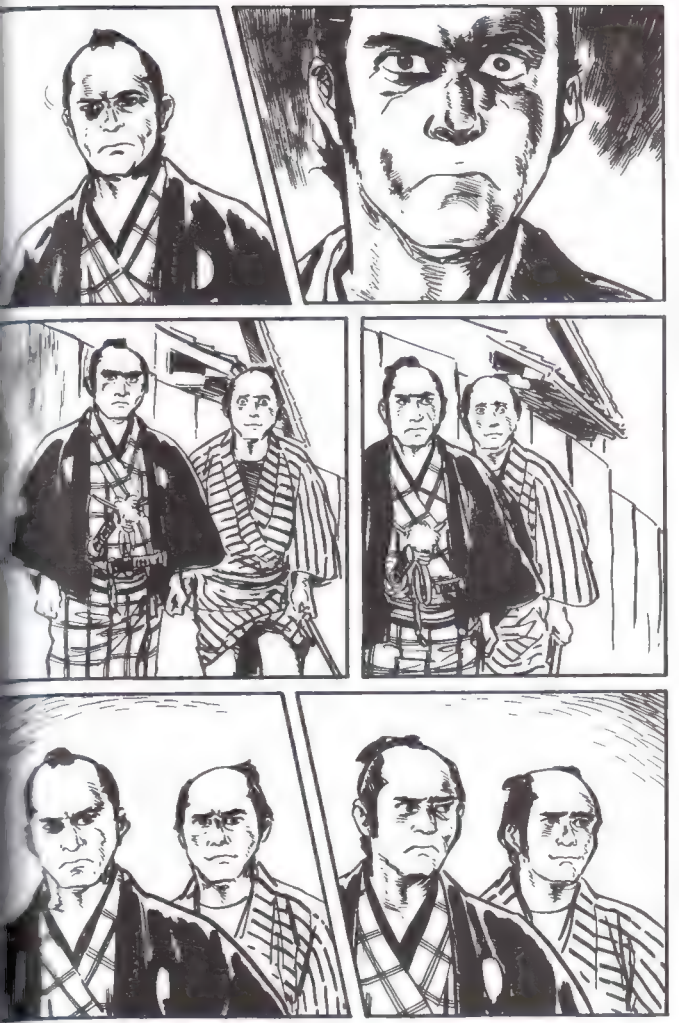
THE ŌTSUDŌ I KNOW WANTED IS DEAD.
WHERE DID HE GO?
HEH, HEH... GET OUT!
TWO DAYS... I CAN'T HELP FEELING THIS WAS THE LAST.
NERVES...? OR LIKE YOU SAID...JUST AGE...?



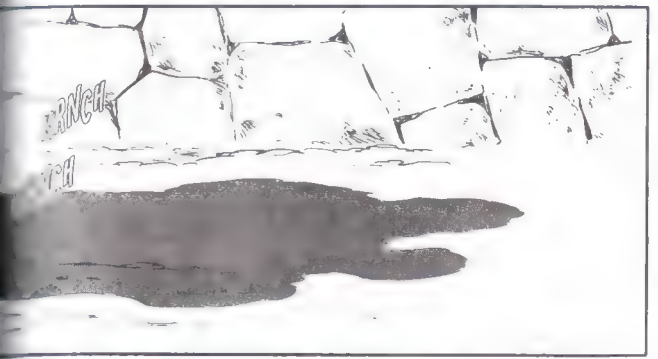
HEY!
HM?
IT CAN'T BE...
BUT IT IS!

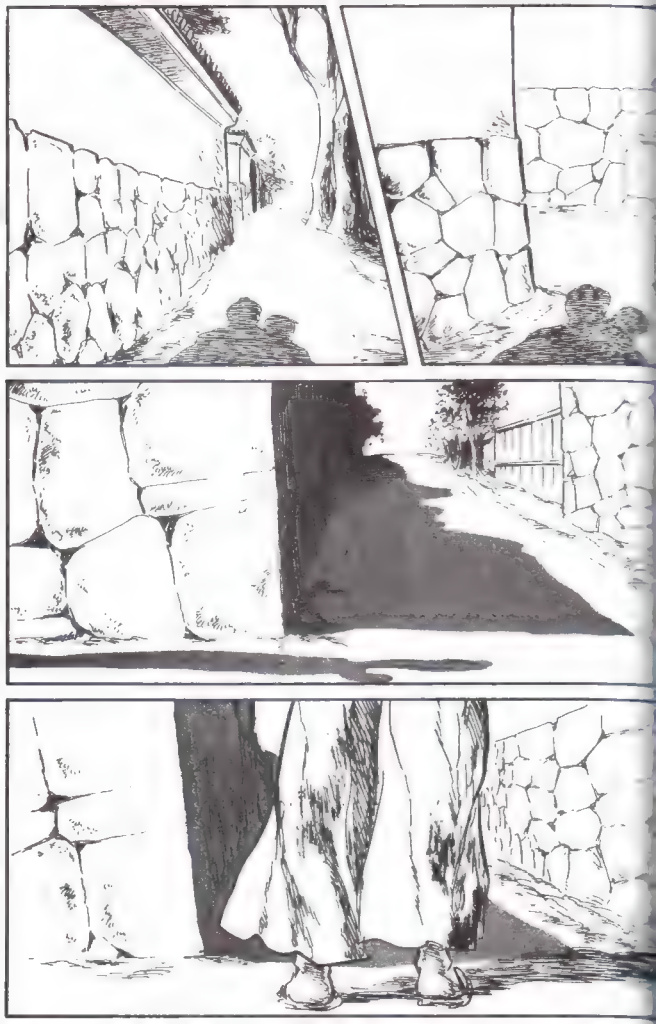
LIKE
THE DEVIL
GIVES ME
GOOSEBUMPS...
BUT THAT
CUTE KID...
YOU'RE
SURE?
I SEEN
THEIR
POSTERS...
THAT'S NOT ALL...
YAOGEN THE GROCER
SAYS ABE-SAMA'S
AFTER HIM.
JEST
WALKIN' DOWN
THE STREET...
HE'S GOT
GUTS!

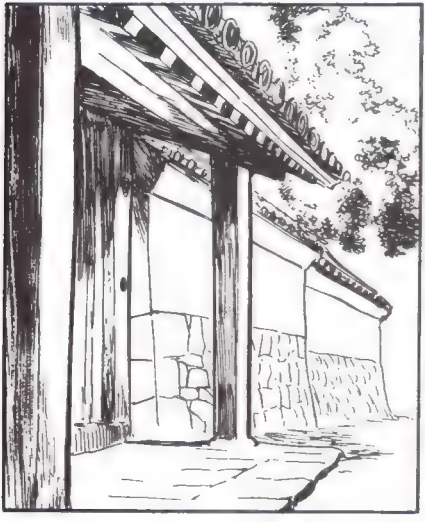

WELL, THEY SAY HE'S THE BEST...
BUT... NO SWORD?
AND WHAT HE COME HERE?

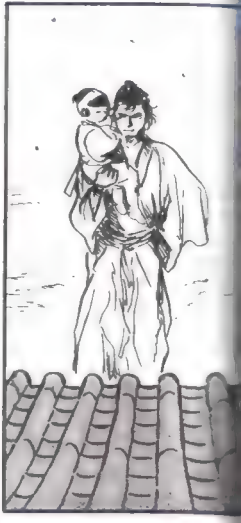


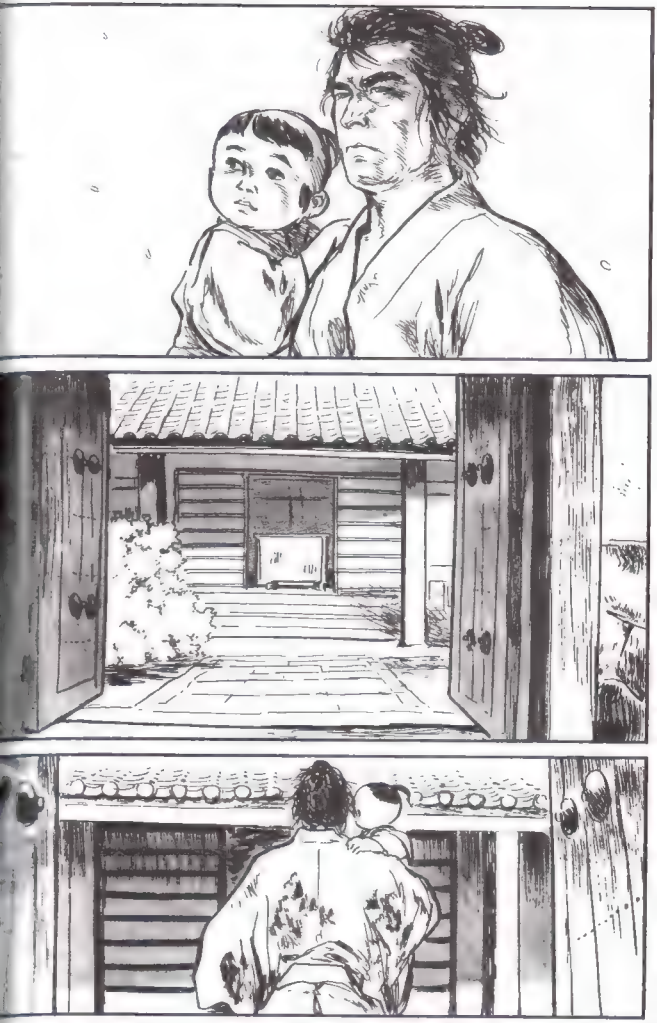
RAVCH
RAVCH


RAVCH



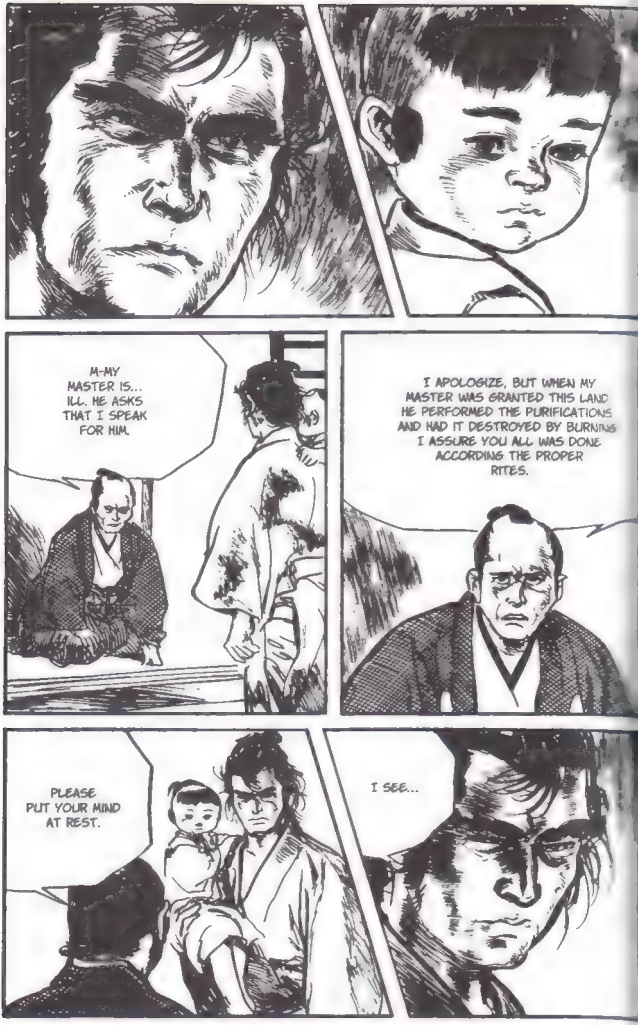


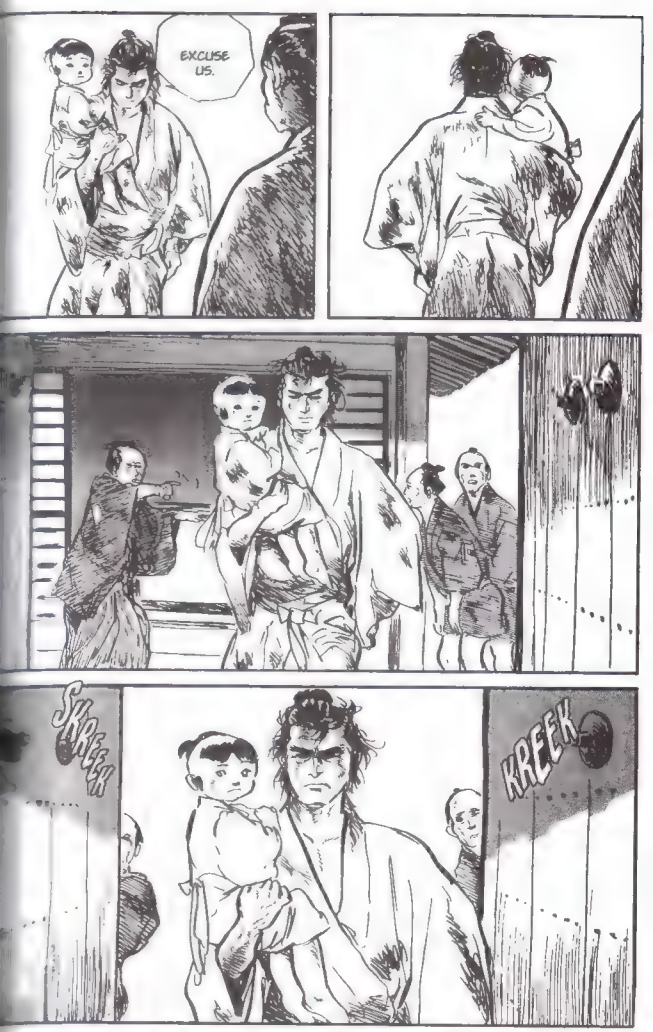


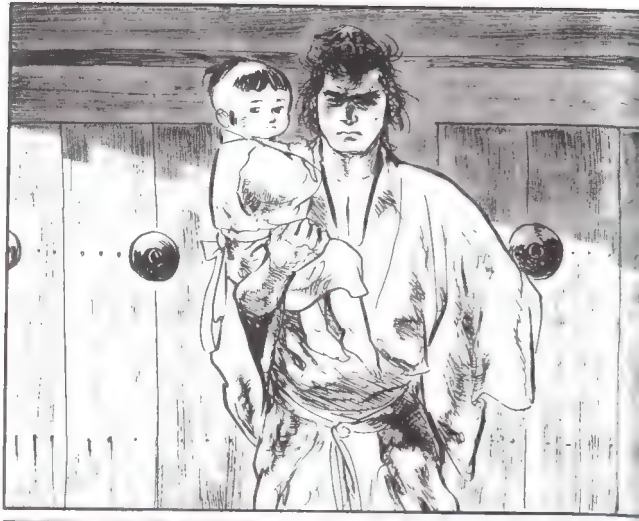


PARDON ME...
ŌGAMI ITTŌ, FORMER KŌSHI KAISHAKUNIN.
AS ONE WHO ONCE LIVED HERE, I ASK A FAVOR.
WHA- WHAT

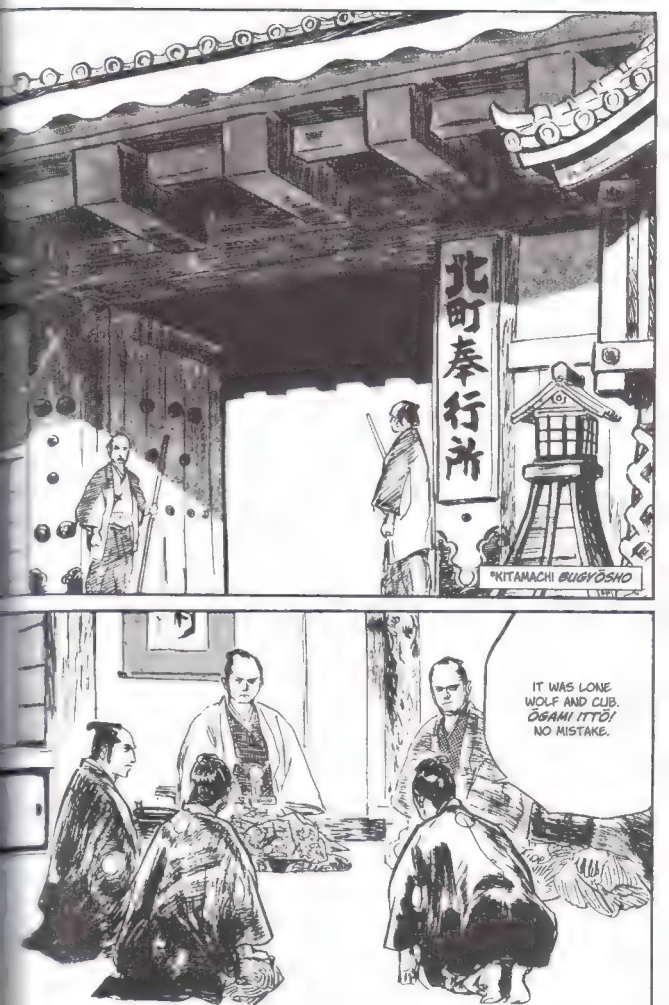
I BUILT A
NE IN THE
DEN FOR
AV HAS IT
SURVIVED?
IF IT IS, I
WOULD LIKE TO
PRAY THERE. WILL
YOU ASK YOUR
MASTER?
LEASE
ERE A
ENT!

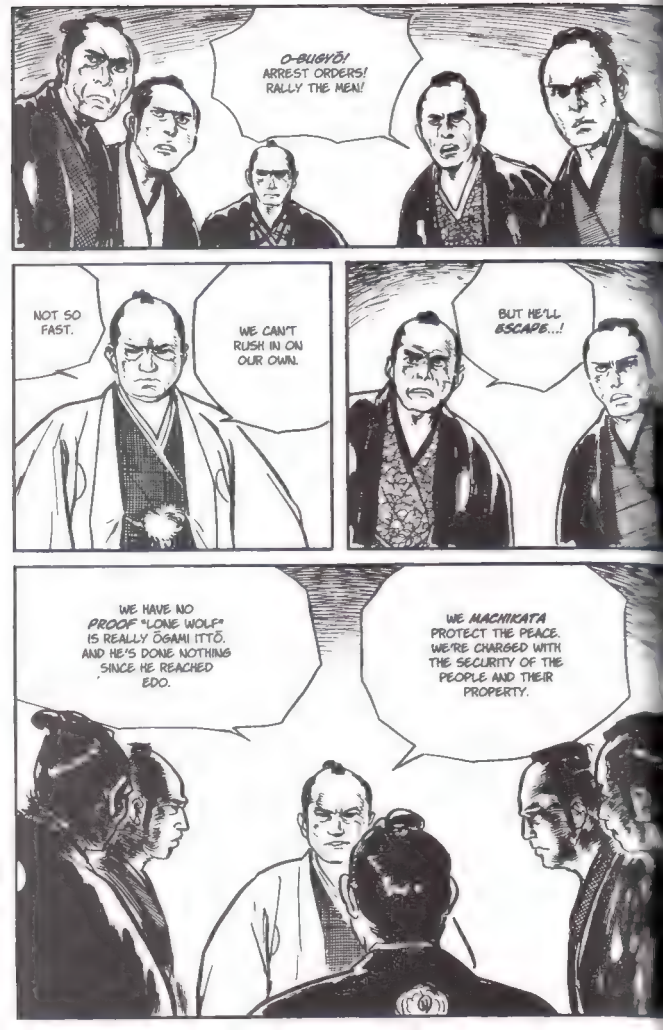

M-MY MASTER IS... ILL. HE ASKS THAT I SPEAK FOR HIM.
I APOLOGIZE, BUT WHEN MY MASTER WAS GRANTED THIS LAND HE PERFORMED THE PURIFICATIONS AND HAD IT DESTROYED BY BURNING I ASSURE YOU ALL WAS DONE ACCORDING THE PROPER RITES.
PLEASE PUT YOUR MIND AT REST.
I SEE...

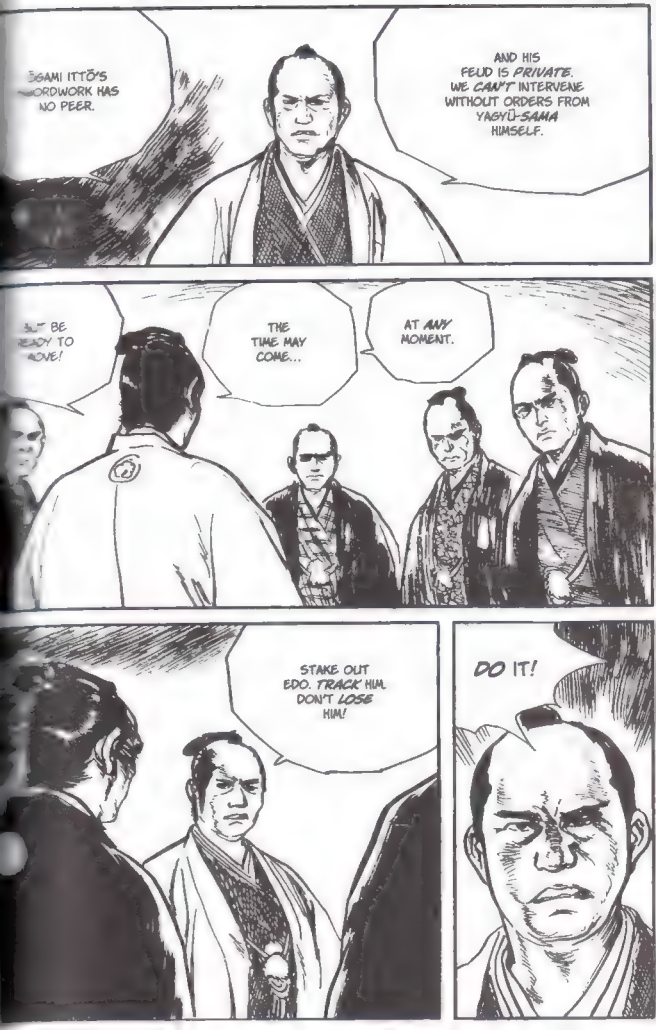

EXCUSE US.
SKREEK
KREEK

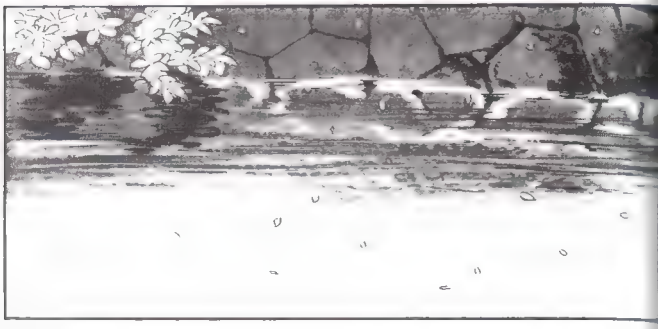


BLAMM

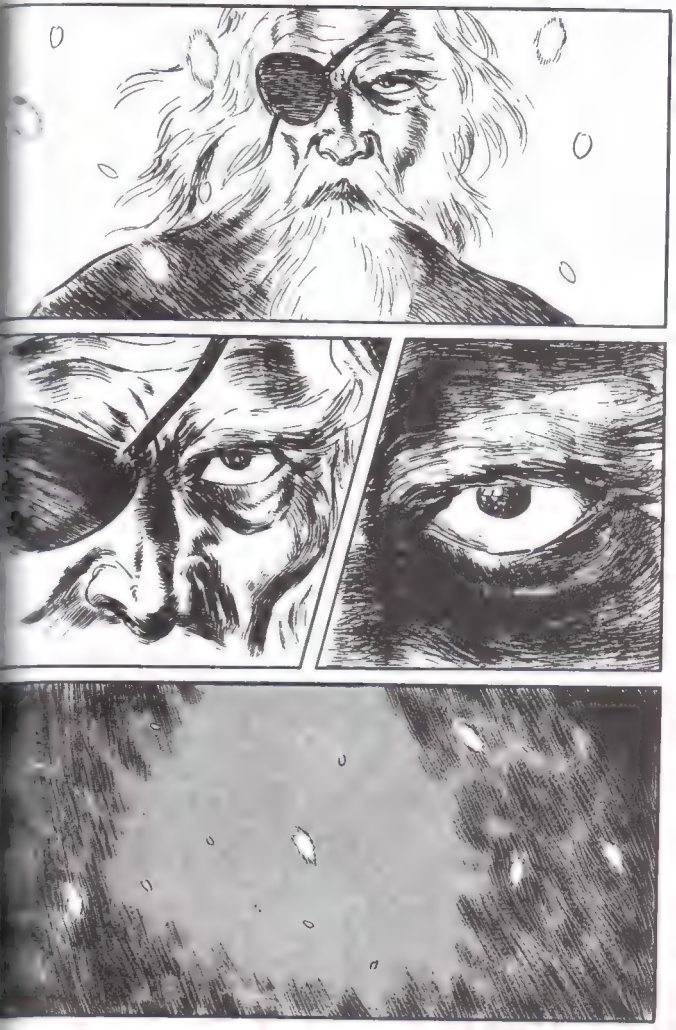

北町奉行所
*KITAMACHI BUGYŌSHO
IT WAS LONE WOLF AND CUB. ŌGAMI ITTŌ! NO MISTAKE.


O-BUGYŌ! ARREST ORDERS! RALLY THE MEN!
NOT SO FAST.
WE CAN'T RUSH IN ON OUR OWN.
BUT HE'LL ESCAPE...!
WE HAVE NO PROOF "LONE WOLF" IS REALLY ŌGAMI ITTŌ. AND HE'S DONE NOTHING SINCE HE REACHED EDO.
WE MACHIKATA PROTECT THE PEACE. WE'RE CHARGED WITH THE SECURITY OF THE PEOPLE AND THEIR PROPERTY.

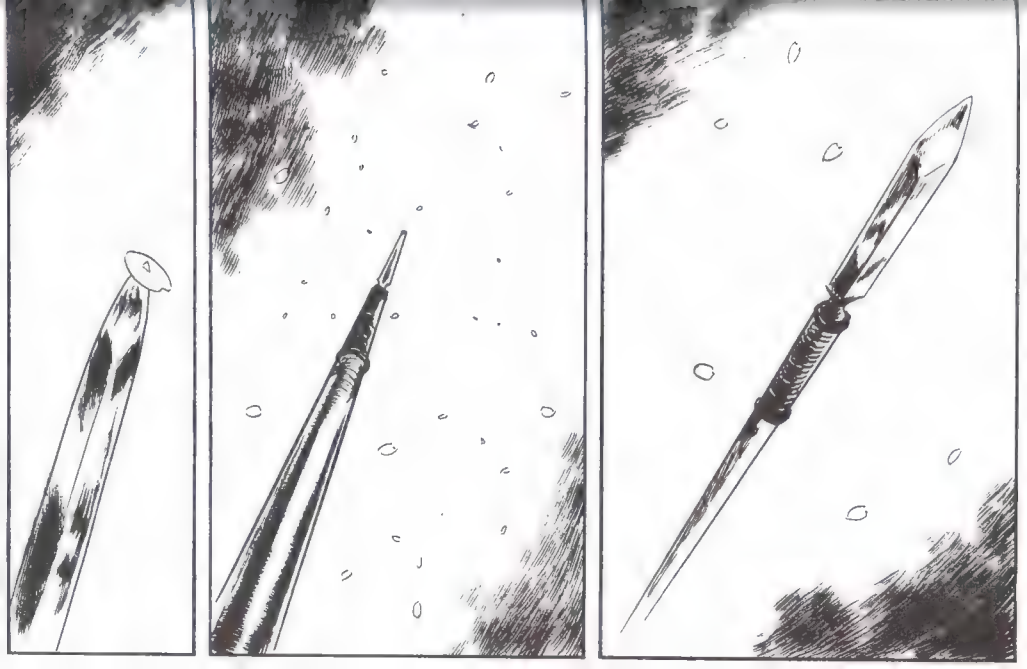

ISAMI ITTŌ'S SWORDWORK HAS NO PEER.
AND HIS FEUD IS PRIVATE. WE CAN'T INTERVENE WITHOUT ORDERS FROM YAGYŪ-SAMA HIMSELF.
...BE READY TO MOVE!
THE TIME MAY COME...
AT ANY MOMENT.
STAKE OUT EDO. TRACK HIM. DON'T LOSE HIM!
DO IT!



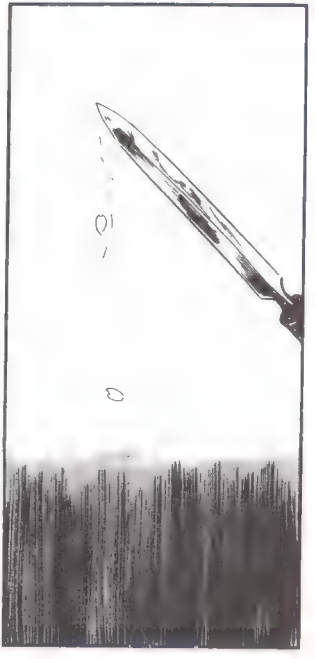
THE LAST BLOSSOMS...
WHICH WILL THEY BE?
FOUR YEARS...



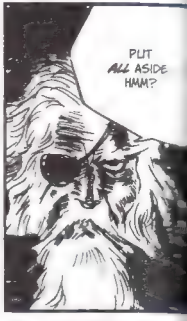
GETTING OLD, RETSUDŌ?!
THE DEVIL YOU SAY!
W-SSSSSH



OPEN THE GATE!



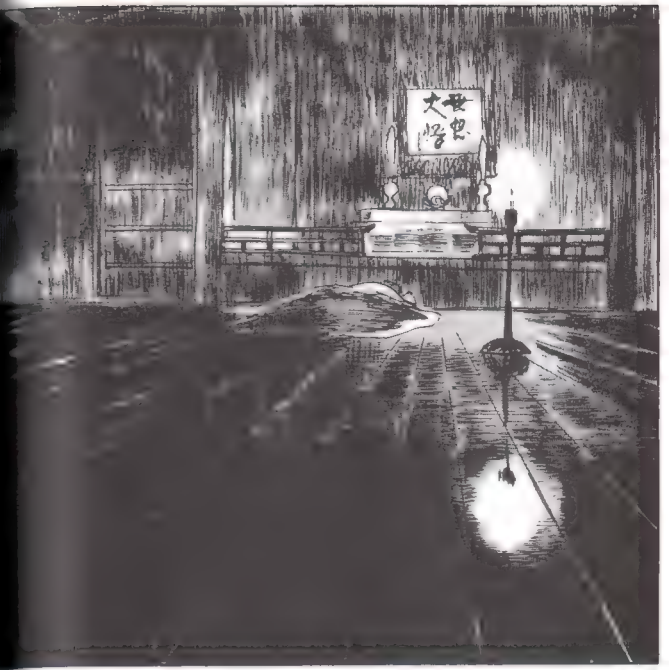
WE BEAR ORDERS FROM THE SHŌGUN. PUT ALL ASIDE, AND APPEAR AT THE *NAKAOKU* AT DAWN.
SO SPOKE OUR LORD.


PUT *ALL* ASIDE HMM?

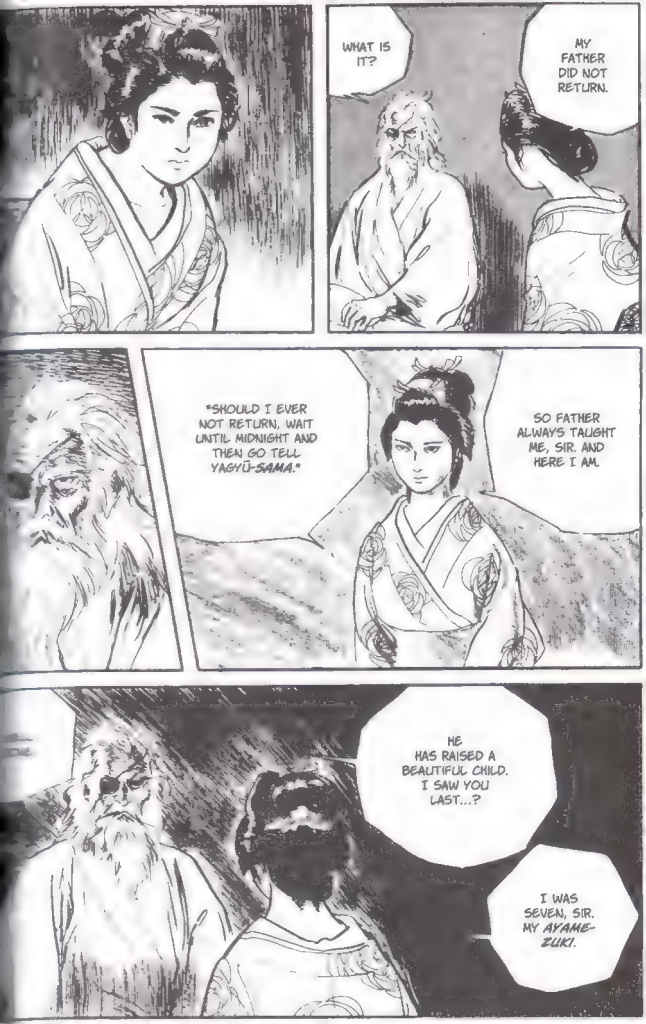
IT IS A MOST *URGENT* SUMMONS.

BY YOUR LEAVE.
"PUT ALL ASIDE"...

WHOOSH


WHO IS IT?

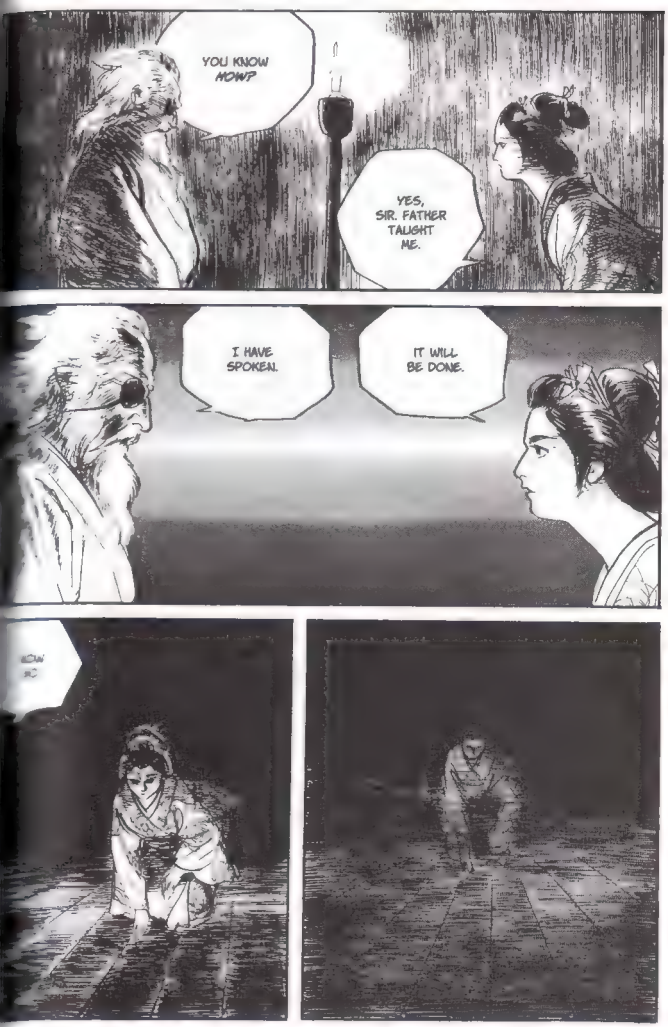
SECRETARY NAKAGAWA ICHIBEI'S DAUGHTER, O-KAN.
APPROACH.
ME

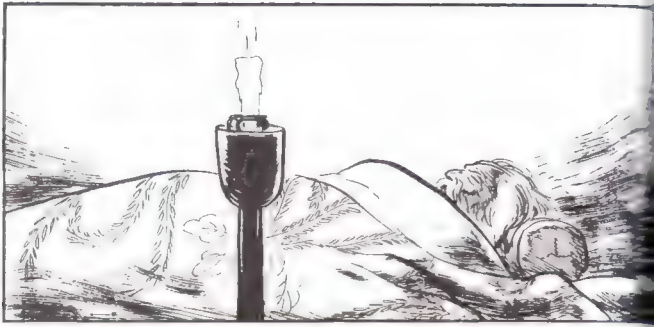

WHAT IS IT?
MY FATHER DID NOT RETURN.
"SHOULD I EVER NOT RETURN, WAIT UNTIL MIDNIGHT AND THEN GO TELL YAGYŪ-SAMA."
SO FATHER ALWAYS TAUGHT ME, SIR. AND HERE I AM.
HE HAS RAISED A BEAUTIFUL CHILD. I SAW YOU LAST...?
I WAS SEVEN, SIR. MY AYAME-ZUKI.

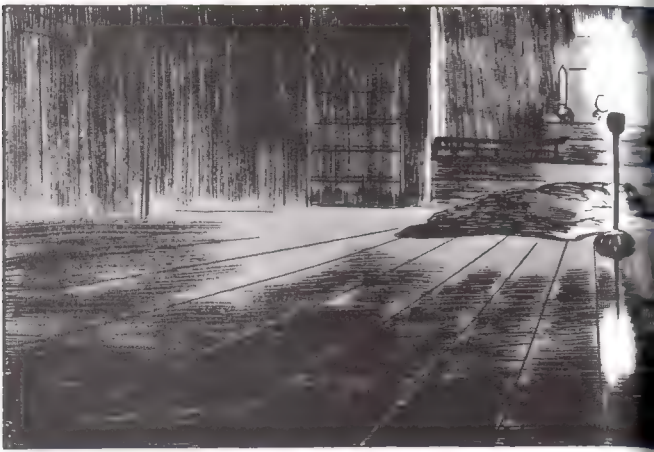
AND YOUR MOTHER'S ILLNESS?
SHE PASSED IN APRIL, SIR.
I THOUGHT YOU'D BE ASLEEP...
BUT THE HOUSE... SO EMPTY...
IT'S OF NO CONCERN.
O-KAN!
ARE YOU PREPARED?
I'M A DAUGHTER OF THE GRASS, MY LORD.
TWO ORDERS. LISTEN WELL.

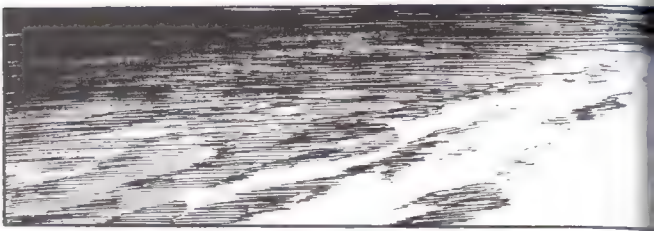
FIRST... I GO TO THE CASTLE AT DAWN. IF I—LIKE YOUR FATHER—DO NOT RETURN...
...TO THE ...CHŌ AT ...OON
THE FORMER KŌSHŪ KAISHAKUNIN ŌGAMI ITTŌ AND HIS SON DAIGORO WILL BE THERE.
"PERHAPS, SHISAN."
"PERHAPS SHISAN"...?
SIR, WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

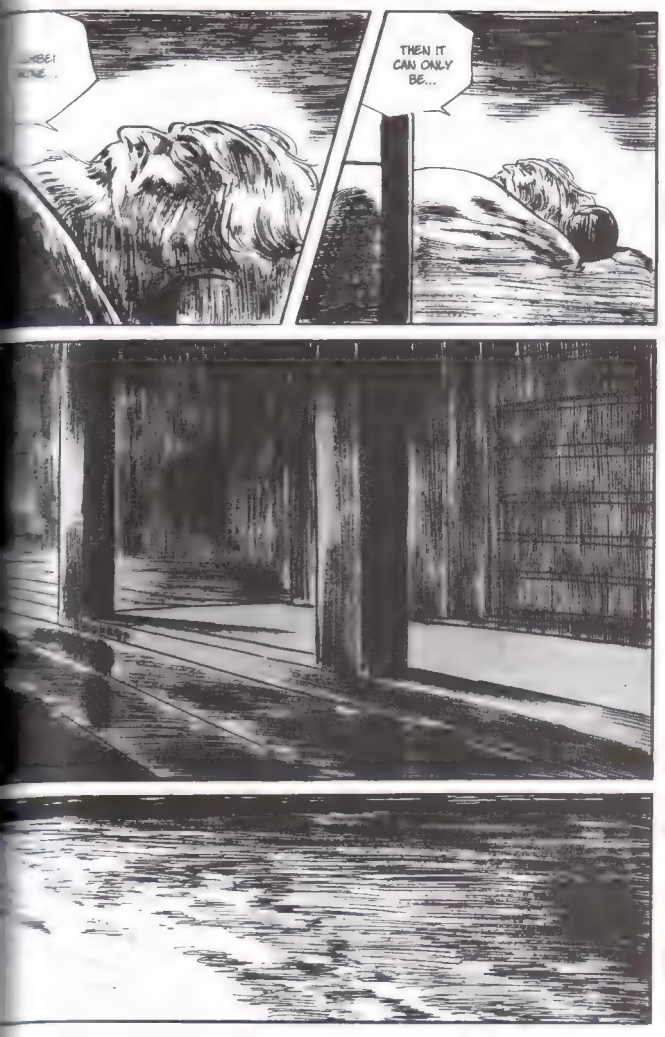
TO COME LATE— "CHISAN." TO COME IN DEATH— "SHISAN."
HE WILL UNDERSTAND.
SECOND... CALL IN THE GRASS.
SUMMON THE SATOIRI-NIN IN EVERY HAN AND TERRITORY TO EDO. THE YAGYŪ KUSA...ALL OF THEM.
HAVE THEM CONTACT ME IN THE CASTLE AND AWAIT MY ORDERS. UNDERSTAND?

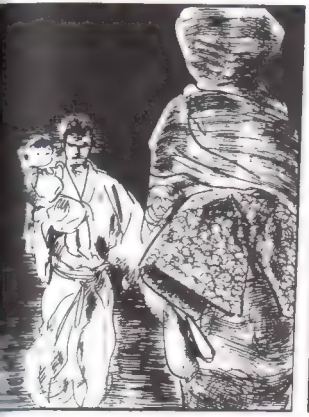

YOU KNOW HOW?
YES, SIR. FATHER TAUGHT ME.
I HAVE SPOKEN.
IT WILL BE DONE.
KOW
KO

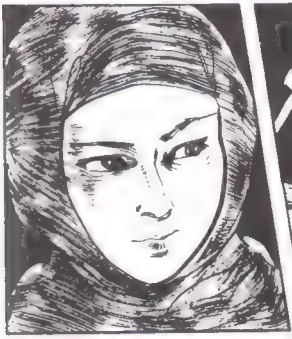







THEN IT CAN ONLY BE...

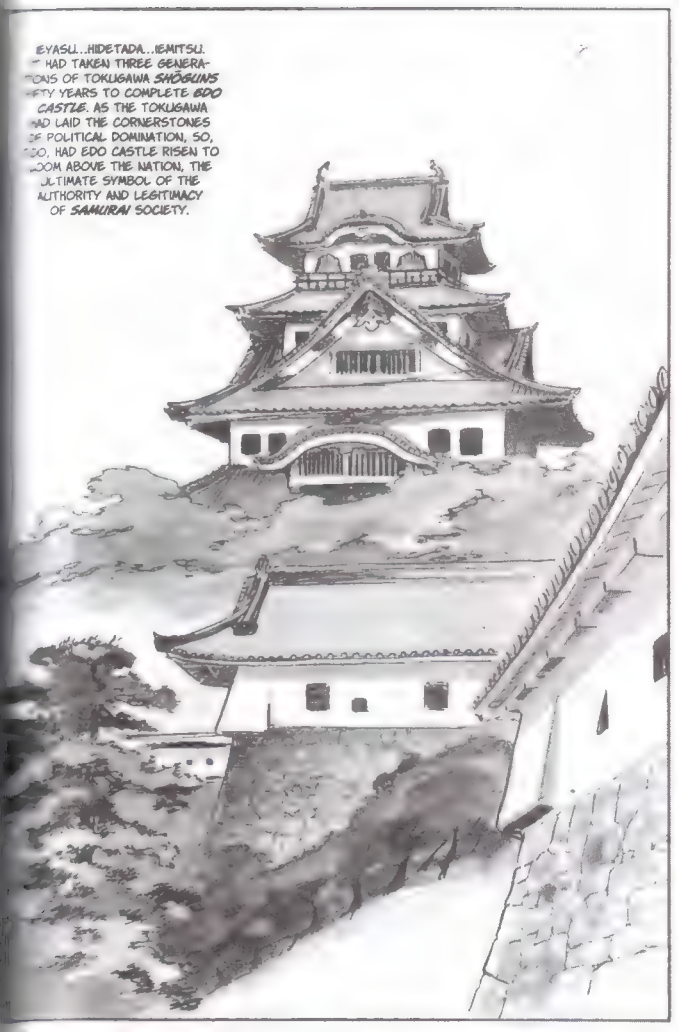


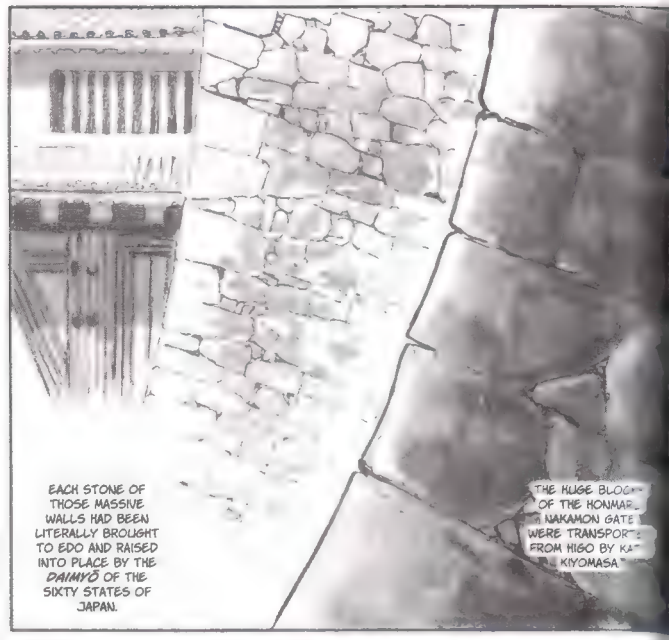


THAT WAS Sasuke ITTŌ
WHAT FOR ?
AND RETSUDŌ-SAMA CALLS TWO HUNDRED BRASS TO EDO.
...TRAILED BY THE POLICE.
AND WHERE IS MY FATHER...?

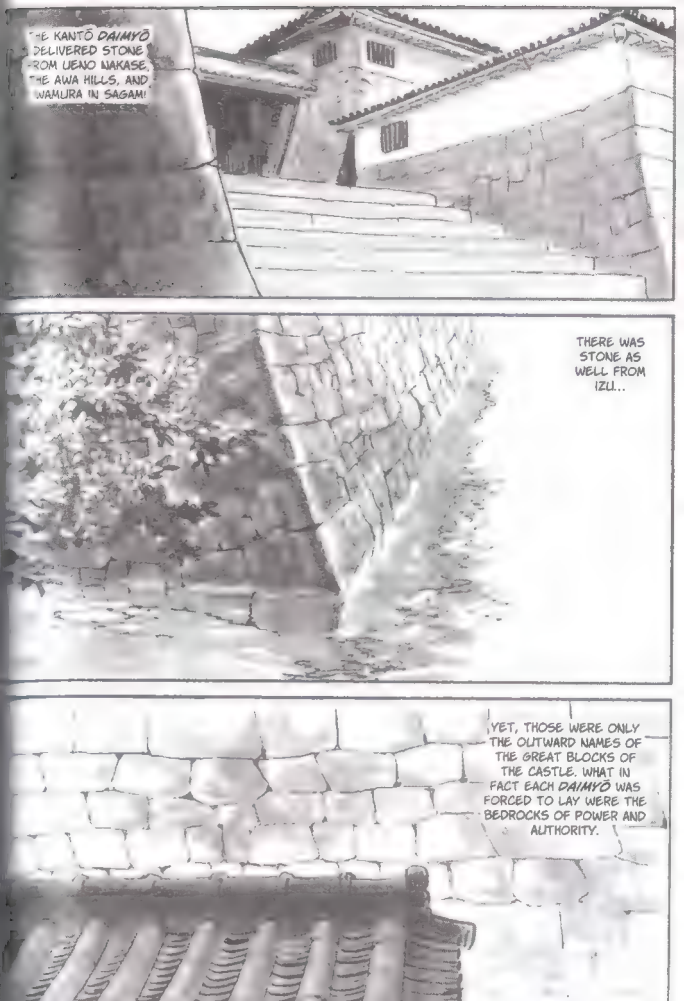
the hundred and twenty-first

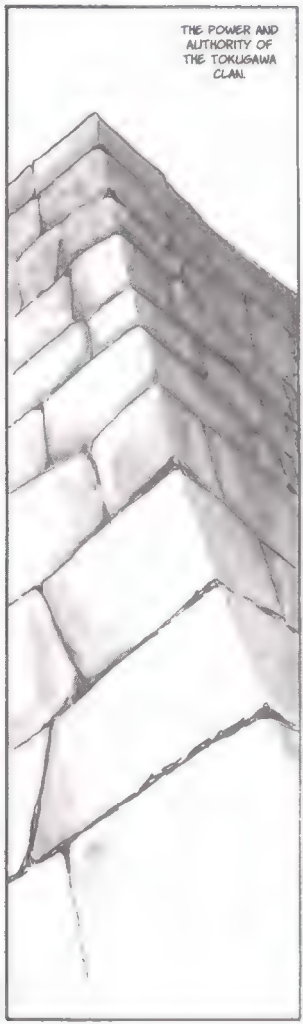
Stone Upon Stone

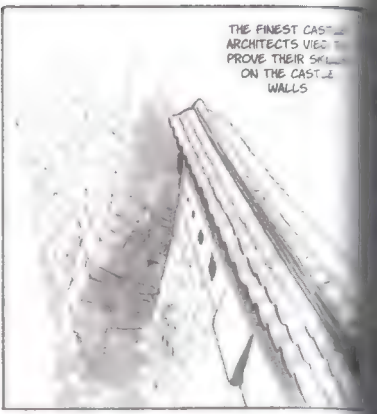

EYASU...HIDETADA...IEMITSU.
HAD TAKEN THREE GENERA-
TIONS OF TOKUGAWA SHŌGUNS
FIFTY YEARS TO COMPLETE EDO
CASTLE. AS THE TOKUGAWA
HAD LAID THE CORNERSTONES
OF POLITICAL DOMINATION, SO,
TOO, HAD EDO CASTLE RISEN TO
LOOM ABOVE THE NATION, THE
ULTIMATE SYMBOL OF THE
AUTHORITY AND LEGITIMACY
OF SAMURAI SOCIETY.

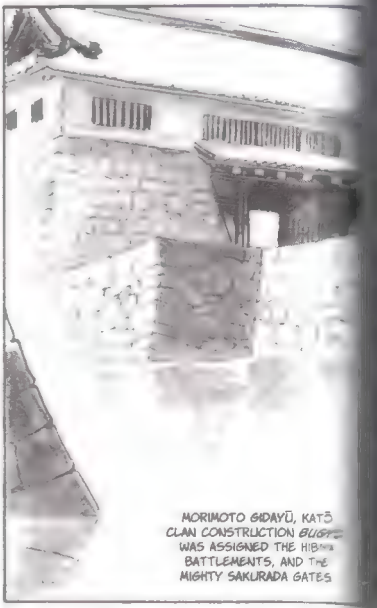

EACH STONE OF THOSE MASSIVE WALLS HAD BEEN LITERALLY BROUGHT TO EDO AND RAISED INTO PLACE BY THE *DAIMYŌ* OF THE SIXTY STATES OF JAPAN.
THE HUGE BLOCK OF THE HONMAR NAKAMON GATE WERE TRANSPOR FROM HIGO BY KA KIYOMASA

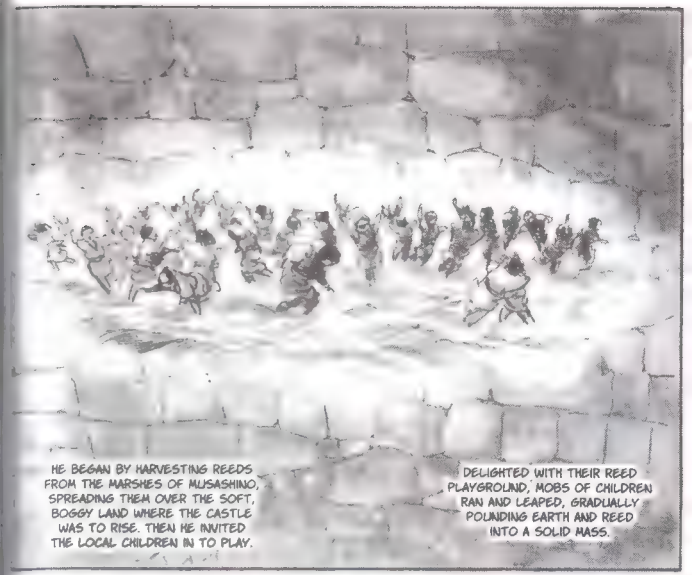
THE *DAIMYŌ* SAIGOKU IN WEST BROU THE BEAUT WHITE STON OF SET

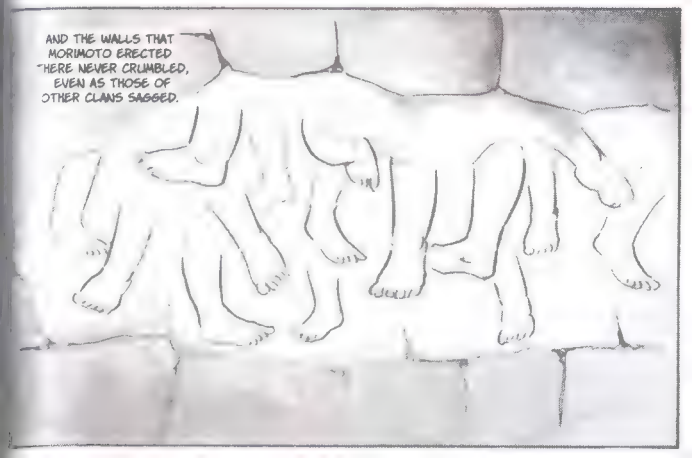

THE KANTŌ DAIMYŌ DELIVERED STONE FROM UENO NAKASE, THE AWA HILLS, AND WAMURA IN SAGAMI
THERE WAS STONE AS WELL FROM IZU...
YET, THOSE WERE ONLY THE OUTWARD NAMES OF THE GREAT BLOCKS OF THE CASTLE. WHAT IN FACT EACH DAIMYŌ WAS FORCED TO LAY WERE THE BEDROCKS OF POWER AND AUTHORITY.

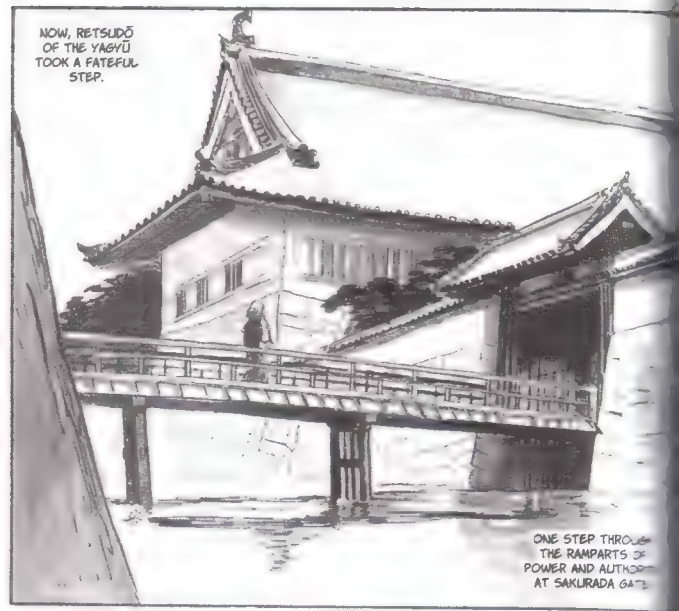

THE POWER AND AUTHORITY OF THE TOKUGAWA CLAN.


THE FINEST CAST
ARCHITECTS VIE
PROVE THEIR SK
ON THE CAST
WALLS

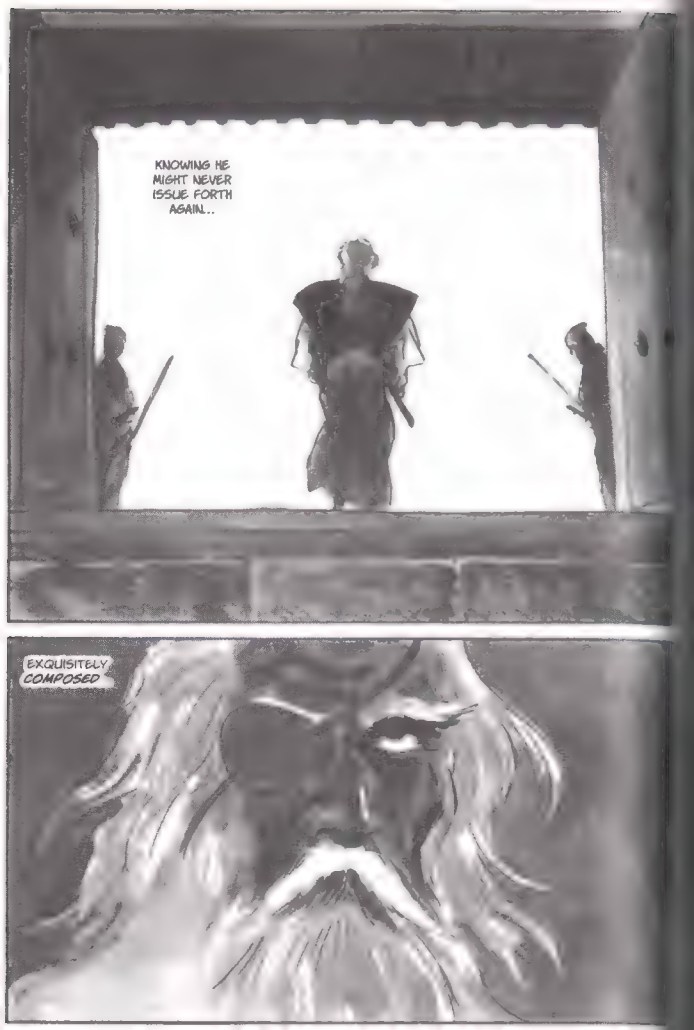

MORIMOTO GIDAYŪ, KATŌ CLAN CONSTRUCTION BUGY
WAS ASSIGNED THE HIB
BATTLEMENTS, AND THE
MIGHTY SAKURADA GATES


HE BEGAN BY HARVESTING REEDS FROM THE MARSHES OF MUSASHINO, SPREADING THEM OVER THE SOFT, BOGGY LAND WHERE THE CASTLE WAS TO RISE. THEN HE INVITED THE LOCAL CHILDREN IN TO PLAY.
DELIGHTED WITH THEIR REED PLAYGROUND, MOBS OF CHILDREN RAN AND LEAPED, GRADUALLY POUNDING EARTH AND REED INTO A SOLID MASS.

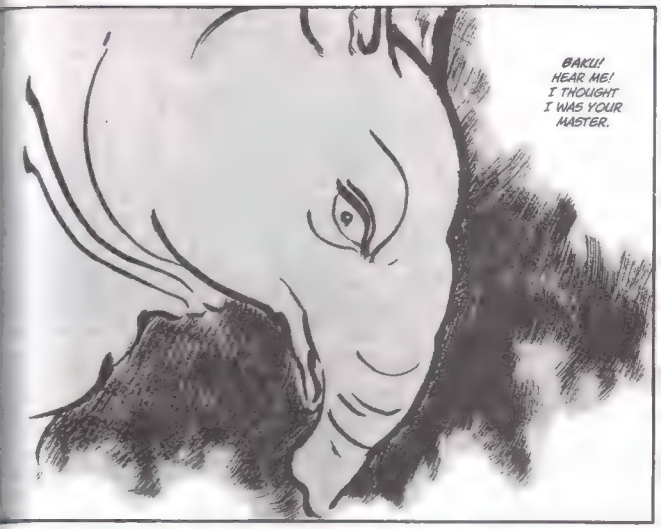

AND THE WALLS THAT MORIMOTO ERECTED THERE NEVER CRUMBLED, EVEN AS THOSE OF OTHER CLANS SAGGED.

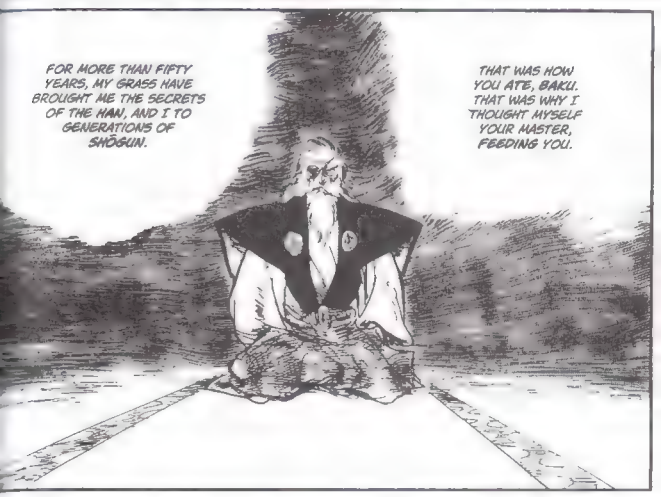

NOW, RETSUDŌ OF THE YAGYŪ TOOK A FATEFUL STEP.
ONE STEP THROUGH THE RAMPARTS OF POWER AND AUTHORITY AT SAKURADA GATE.

U-NO-KOKU (SIX THIRTY A.M.), THE GATES OPENED. TORI-NO-KOKU (SIX P.M.), THE GATES CLOSED. THROUGH THOSE GATES
KREEE


KNOWING HE MIGHT NEVER ISSUE FORTH AGAIN..
EXQUISITELY COMPOSED

EDO CASTLE
NAKAOKU
THE SHŌGUN'S SLEEPING QUARTERS
BAKU, YOU SPIRIT BEAST, MYTHICAL EATER OF DREAMS. YOU LIVE IN OUR LORD'S CHAMBERS, EATING THE DREAMS OF DAIMYŌ.
HOW MANY DAIMYŌ'S DREAMS HAVE YOU EATEN, BAKU? HOW MANY HAVE YOU SENT TO THEIR DEATHS?


BAKU! HEAR ME! I THOUGHT I WAS YOUR MASTER.


FOR MORE THAN FIFTY YEARS, MY GRASS HAVE BROUGHT ME THE SECRETS OF THE HAN, AND I TO GENERATIONS OF SHŌGUN.
THAT WAS HOW YOU ATE, BAKU. THAT WAS WHY I THOUGHT MYSELF YOUR MASTER, FEEDING YOU.

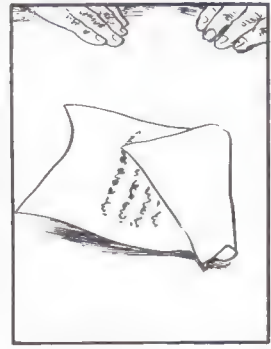
AND NOW YOU WANT TO EAT MY DREAMS?
YOUR MASTER'S DREAMS, BAKU?
EAT THEM, AND THE NATION WILL FRAY LIKE STRAW. YOU MAY NEVER AGAIN HAVE DREAMS TO EAT, BAKU.
AND STILL YOU THINK TO GOBBLE MINE?!
YOU SHALL NOT HAVE THEM, BAKU. NEVER!

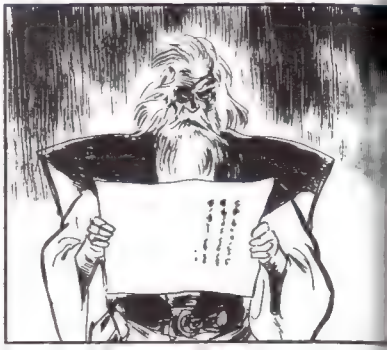
SHKK

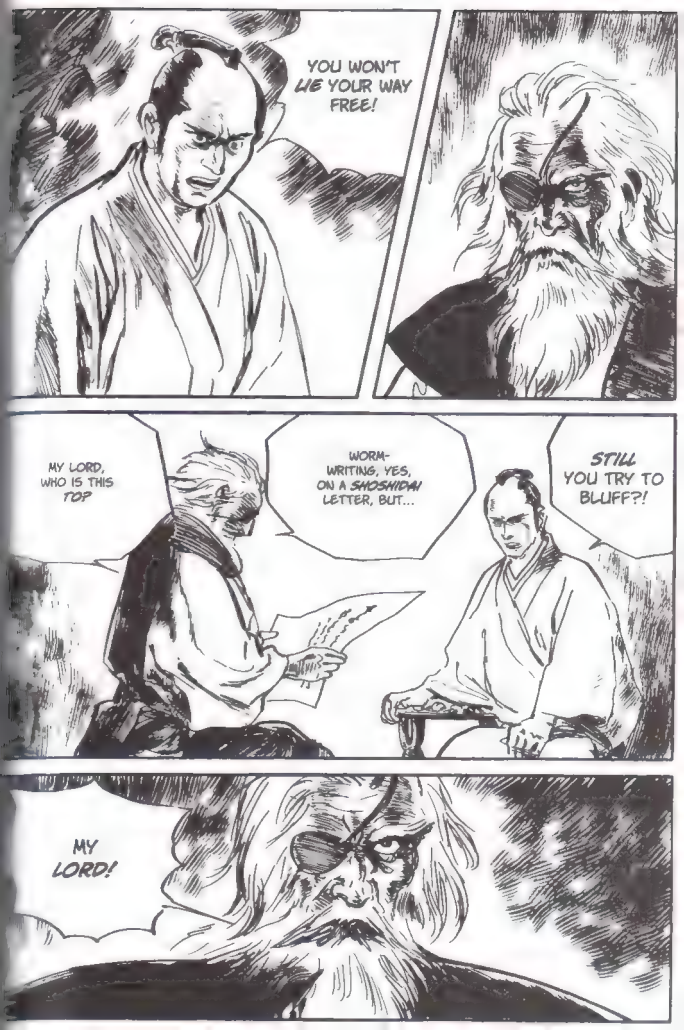
I RECEIVED MY LORD'S URGENT SUMMONS, AND PUT ALL ASIDE. REGRETFULLY, ŌGAMI ITTŌ STILL LIVES...
RETSUDŌ!
WHAT ARE THE YAGYŪ LETTERS?!
YAGYŪ... LETTERS, MY LORD?
WHAT DO YOU MEAN?

HOW DARE YOU PLAY THE FOOL?!
I MEAN THE SECRETS THAT THE KUSA, YOUR NINJA, SEND IN MY GO-JŌBAKO!
NVISIBLE NK, FROM MULBERRY!
SECRET MESSAGES, CHEWED BY SILKWORMS!
DON'T YOU DARE DENY IT!
ORGIVE MY LORD, EVER-
SILENCE!

FWHPP



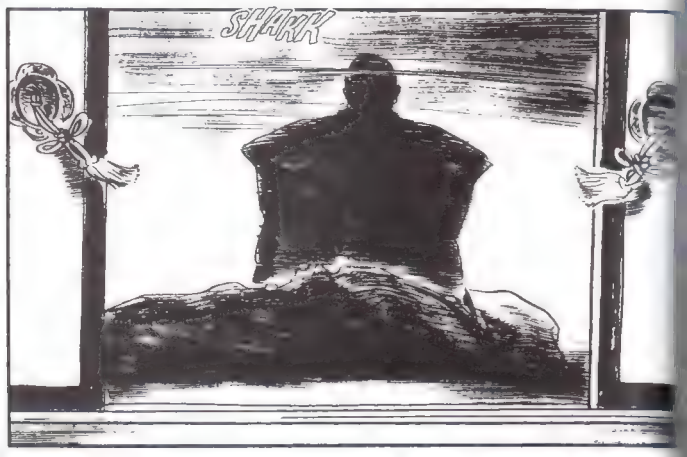



YOU WON'T *LIE* YOUR WAY FREE!
MY LORD, WHO IS THIS *TOP*
WORM-WRITING, YES, ON A *SHOSHIDAI* LETTER, BUT...
STILL YOU TRY TO BLUFF?!
MY *LORD!*

AS THE SHŌGUNATE'S SŌ-METSUKE, THE YAGYŪ CONTROL THE DAIMYŌ. ONE NEEDS SOLID PROOF BEFORE ACCUSING MY CLAN.
I AM PUZZLED TO BE TREATED AS THOUGH WE DISRESPECT OUR LORD, ON THE BASIS OF SOME NAMELESS SCRIPT...
WHO ELSE COULD DO THIS?!
SKRNCH
THIS ONE, TOO!

EVERY LETTER IN THE BOX!
MY LORD
YOUR RETSUDŌ HAS SERVED THE TOKUGAWA CREST FOR FIFTY YEARS.
PRAYING FOR YOUR GLORY, SHUNNING GAIN...
...ONLY SO COULD I BE SŌ-METSUKE.
WILL YOU WEIGH FIFTY YEARS' SERVICE AGAINST SOME ANONYMOUS SCRIPT?

TO QUESTION MY LOYALTY WILL SHAKE THE NATION. PLEASE, HEAR MY WORDS.
IF THE DAIMYŌ THINK EVEN THE YAGYŪ CAN BE PILLORIED— WITHOUT PROOF— THEIR LOYALTY WILL WAVER..


SHARK

RETSUDŌ-SAMA.
YOU STILL THINK YOU CAN BLUFF IT OUT...?

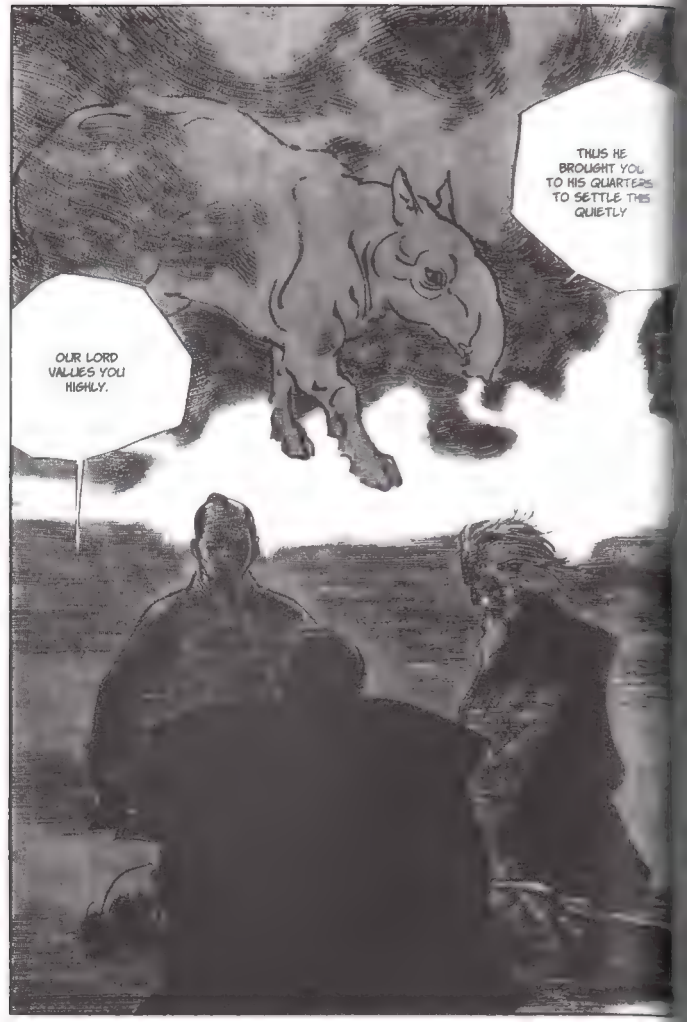
HRMF!
DOESN'T TWITCH AN EYEBROW. STILL AS STONE!
AS WE'D EXPECT OF YAGYŪ RETSUDŌ-SAMA— OF COURSE HE KNEW ALREADY.

RETSUDŌ-SAMA... NAKAGAWA-DONO COULDN'T DECEIVE OUR LORD. HE TOLD ALL, AND THEN BIT OFF HIS TONGUE.
ANSWER, RETSUDŌ.
I HAVE NOTHING TO SAY TO A MERE POISON TASTER.
RETSUDŌ!
YOU'RE BEFORE OUR LORD!!

ENOUGH OF YOUR IMPUDENCE! BOW IN HIS PRESENCE!
THE SŌ-METSUKE INVESTIGATES TOKUGAWA VASSALS, NOT YOU! BEGONE, ABE TANOSHI!!

IF THERE WAS WORM-WRITING IN OFFICIAL LETTERS, OF COURSE NAKAGAWA TOOK RESPONSIBILITY! BUT WHERE IS THE LINK TO ME?
SPEAK, TANOSHI!!
I... THAT'S...
YOU MUST HAVE SET THIS UP!
YOU, BECAUSE YOU ARE NOT BUSHI!
YOU SAY NAKAGAWA "TOLD ALL"...? HOW ABSURD!
HOW COULD HE REVEAL WHAT I'VE NEVER HEARD OF?

AND IF HE WORKED WITH ANOTHER, OF COURSE HE WOULD *DIE* BEFORE EXPOSING HIM.
THAT'S THE *BUSHI* WAY.
ONLY ONE *NOT* A *BUSHI* COULD DREAM UP SUCH A PLAN!
R-RETSUDŌ-*SAMA*...LISTEN. RIGHT NOW...
...OUR LORD AND MYSELF ALONE KNOW OF THE LETTERS


THUS HE BROUGHT YOU TO HIS QUARTERS TO SETTLE THIS QUIETLY
OUR LORD VALUES YOU HIGHLY.

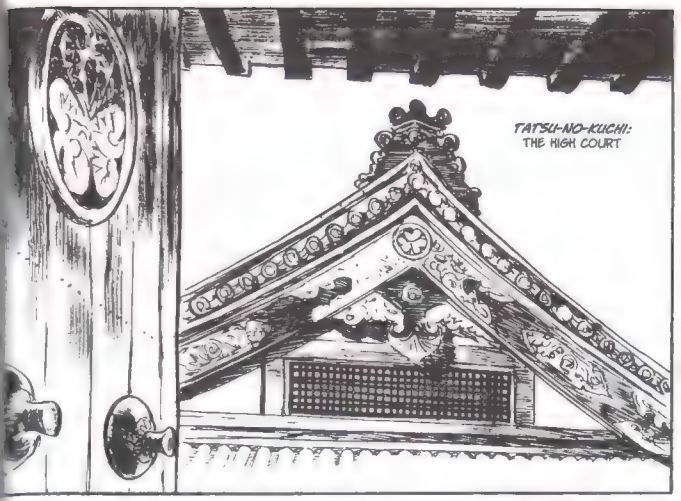
TWIST AND TURN ALL YOU LIKE. NOW THAT HE'S SEEN THE LETTERS AND NAKAGAWA-DONO'S DEATH...
...HE WILL NOT TRUST YOU. BETTER TO TELL ALL...
...AND BEG FOR MERCY.
OUT OF THE QUESTION!

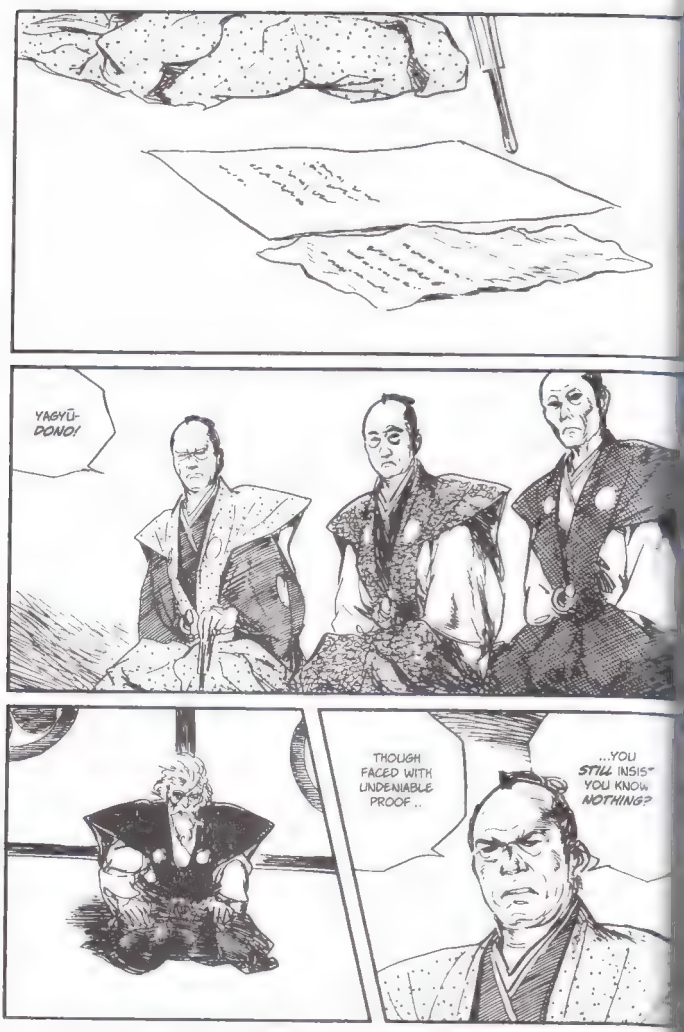
FORGIVE ME FOR RAISING MY VOICE BEFORE MY LORD.
RETSUDŌ! CONFESS NOW...
...SEEK MERCY AND I WI... CONSIDER IT.

BUT CONTINUE YOUR FOOLISH DENIALS, AND I'LL PUT YOU BEFORE THE SHŌGUNATE HIGH COURT!
WELL...? WHAT SAY YOU?!

SINCE I KNOW NOTHING...

TATSU-NO-KUCHI:
THE HIGH COURT

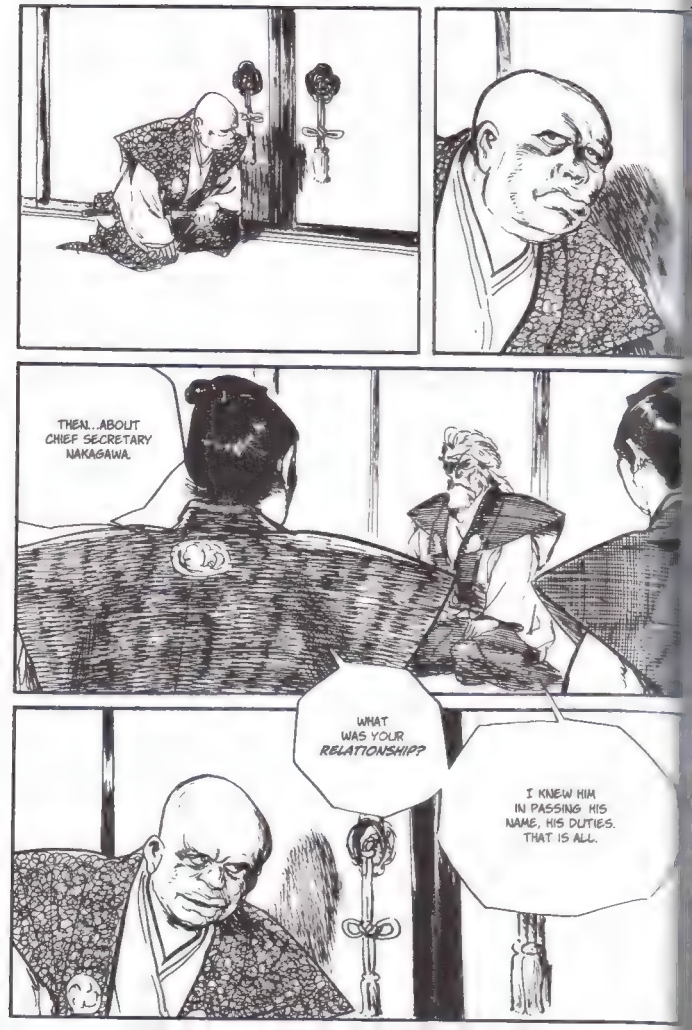

TATSU-NO-KUCHI:
THE HIGH COURT


YAGYŪ-
DONO!
THOUGH FACED WITH UNDENIABLE PROOF..
..YOU STILL INSIST YOU KNOW NOTHING?

ONLY BECAUSE I SPEAK THE TRUTH.
THEN, LET ME ASK YOU...
...WHO ELSE COULD PUT THIS "WORM-WRITING" IN A DOCUMENT? WHO WAS IT SENT TO?

I WOULD LIKE TO KNOW MYSELF.
WHAT INSOLENCE!
WHO ELSE COULD IT BE BUT YOU?
WITH ALL RESPECT... THE GO-RŌJŪ OFFERS MERE SPECULATION.
IT IS IMPROPER TO LEAP TO SUCH CONCLUSIONS

YET...NO ONE ELSE IN THE SHŌGUNATE COULD DO IT.
EVEN *WITHOUT* MORE PROOF, THE ANSWER IS *CLEAR!*
WHEN THE RAIN FALLS, UMBRELLAS OPEN.
YET WHY DOES THE RAIN FALL?
DOES IT FALL BECAUSE WE OPEN UMBRELLAS? OR IS IT THE OTHER WAY AROUND?
WHAT YOU CALL *OBVIOUS* IS NO MORE THAN THIS. FIRST, WE MUST KNOW ABOUT THE *RAIN.*
RRG...

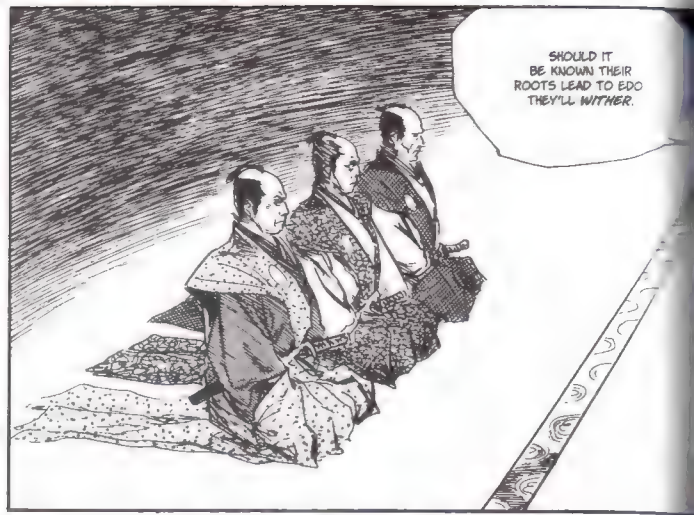

THEN...ABOUT CHIEF SECRETARY NAKAGAWA.
WHAT WAS YOUR *RELATIONSHIP?*
I KNEW HIM IN PASSING HIS NAME, HIS DUTIES. THAT IS ALL.

HOW MANY SATOIRI-NINJA DO YOU CONTROL?
SOME TWO HUNDRED.
TELL US THEIR NAMES UNDER OATH.
IMPOSSIBLE.
IF YOU CAN'T RECALL, YOU MUST HAVE A LIST.
THAT IS MY PRIVATE AFFAIR...
WE NEED TO CHECK IT FOR THE NAME OF THE SENDER OF THE WORM-WRITING...
...AND FOR THE NAME OF NAKAGAWA ICHIBEI!

DON'T TRY TO CLAIM YOU DON'T KEEP ONE!
MY LORD. YOUR FAVOR.
RETSUDŌ! PRODUCE THE LIST!
I REFUSE.
WHAT?! YOU DEFY MY DIRECT ORDER?!

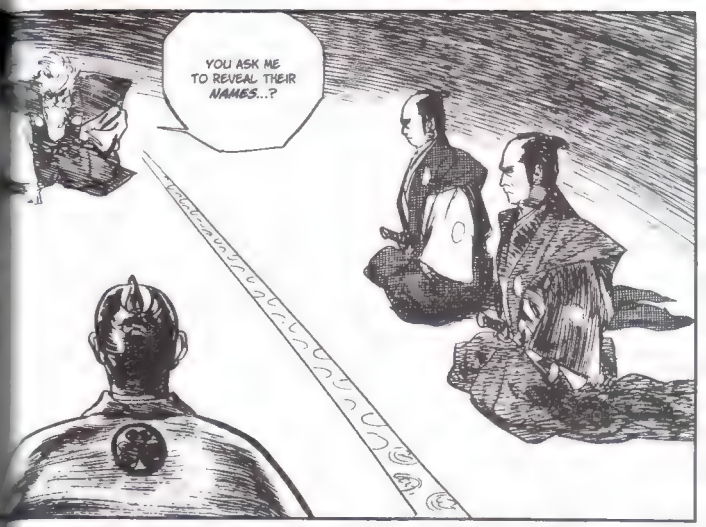
MY LORD...THE SATOIRI-NINJA WE'RE SENT TO THE SIXTY STATES OF JAPAN IN THE TIME OF MY GRANDFATHER SOSUKE, AT THE COMMAND OF YOUR HONORED ANCESTOR, IEYASU-KŌ!
THEY ARE THE GRASS, CULTIVATED FOR GENERATIONS!

IN TIME OF CRISIS, THE SECRET SHOCK TROOPS OF THE TOKUGAWA!
THEY GIVE THEIR LIVES TO FIND THE NATION'S SECRETS.

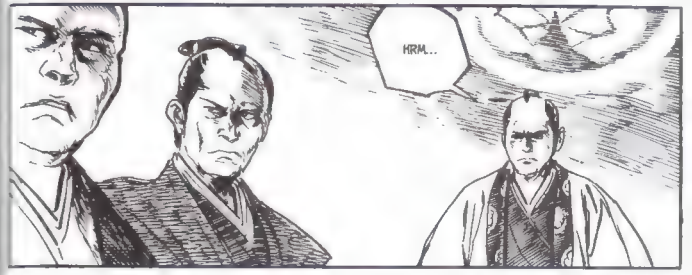

SHOULD IT BE KNOWN THEIR ROOTS LEAD TO EDO THEY'LL *WITHER*.

I CANNOT, FOR *THUS* COMMANDED *SHŌGUN* IEYASU—
—"*NEVER* REVEAL THE GRASS, OR THE TOKUGAWA CLAN SHALL PERISH!" SHALL I THEN SPEAK THOSE NAMES...?

SHOULD IT BE KNOWN THEIR ROOTS LEAD TO EDO THEY'LL *WITHER*.


YOU ASK ME TO REVEAL THEIR *NAMES*...?

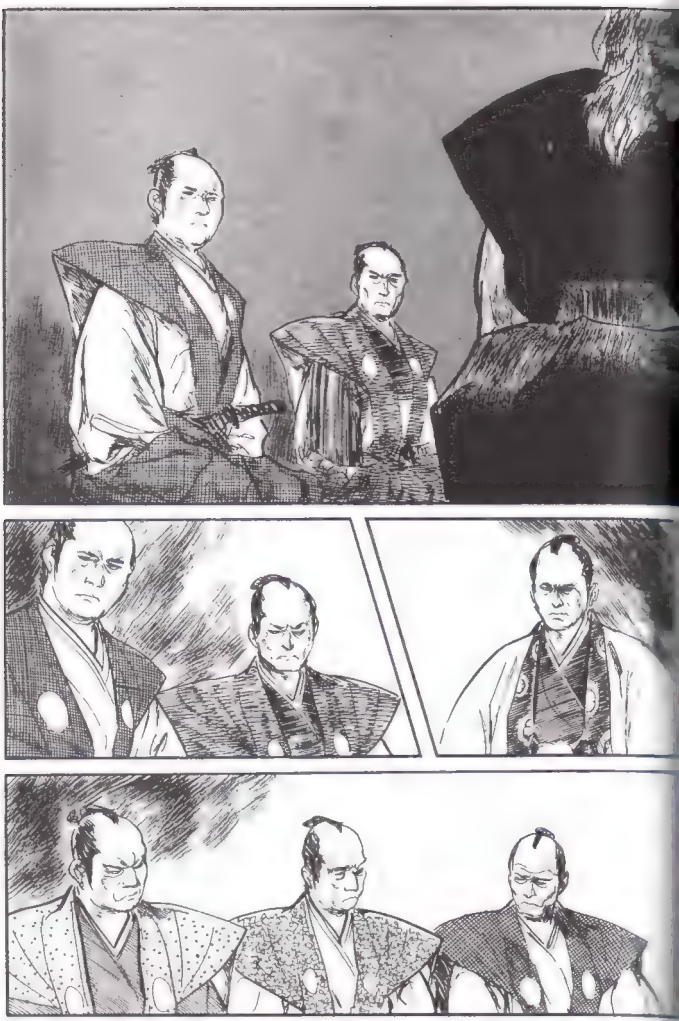
I CANNOT, FOR *THUS* COMMANDED *SHŌGUN* IEYASU—
—"*NEVER* REVEAL THE GRASS, OR THE TOKUGAWA CLAN SHALL PERISH!" SHALL I THEN SPEAK THOSE NAMES...?

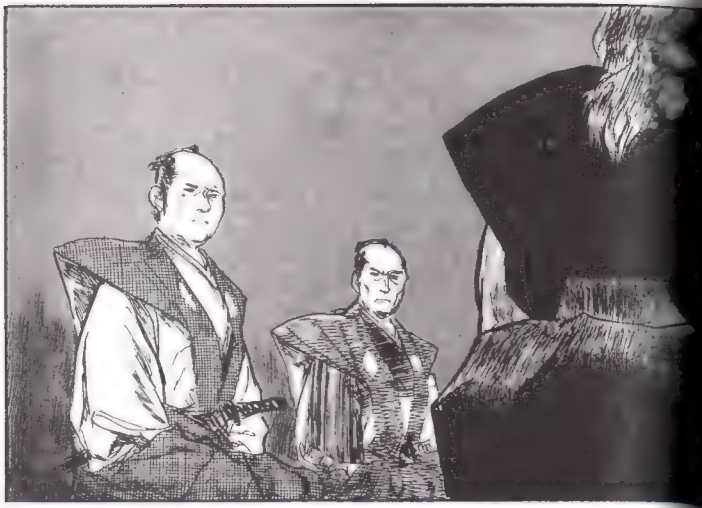

HRM...

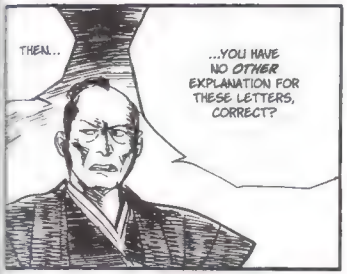
YOU ASK ME TO REVEAL THEIR NAMES...?
HRM...

THE NAMES OF THE GRASS HAVE BEEN HELD BY MY CLAN FOR GENERATIONS. THEY'RE OUR BEDROCK, FOREVER SECRET.
SHALL I PULL UP THE GRASS?!
AND YET, THAT DOESN'T MAKE YOU IMMUNE.

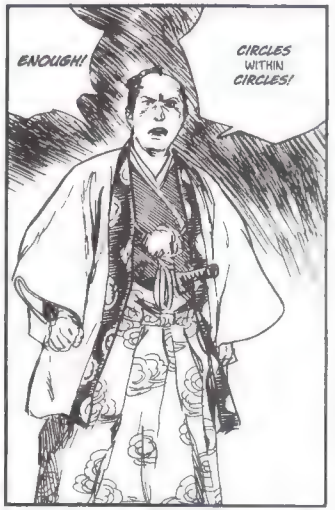
IF YOU CREATE SOMETHING LIKE THESE *LETTERS*, DISRESPECTING OUR *LORD*, WE NEED TO KNOW THE *TRUTH!*
FORGET THE LIST FOR NOW.
INSTEAD, TELL US HOW YOU RECEIVE REPORTS FROM THE GRASS. YOU DENY THESE LETTERS ARE TO YOU? THEN *HOW*...?
FOR THE AFORESAID REASON, I *REFUSE*.

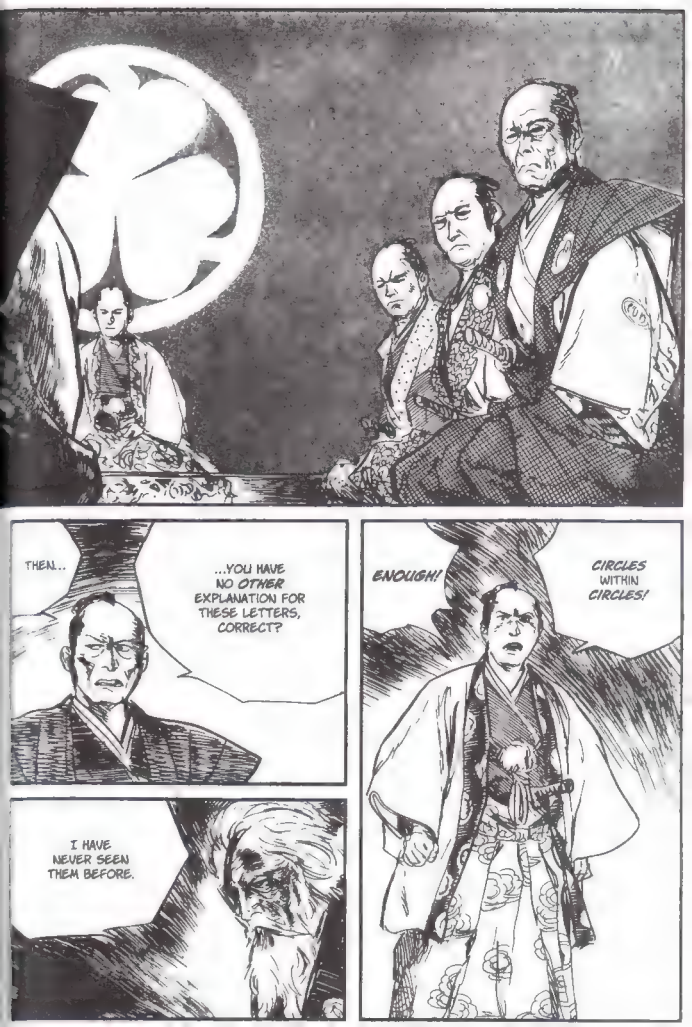





THEN...
...YOU HAVE NO OTHER EXPLANATION FOR THESE LETTERS, CORRECT?

I HAVE NEVER SEEN THEM BEFORE.


ENOUGH!
CIRCLES WITHIN CIRCLES!


THEN...
...YOU HAVE NO OTHER EXPLANATION FOR THESE LETTERS, CORRECT?
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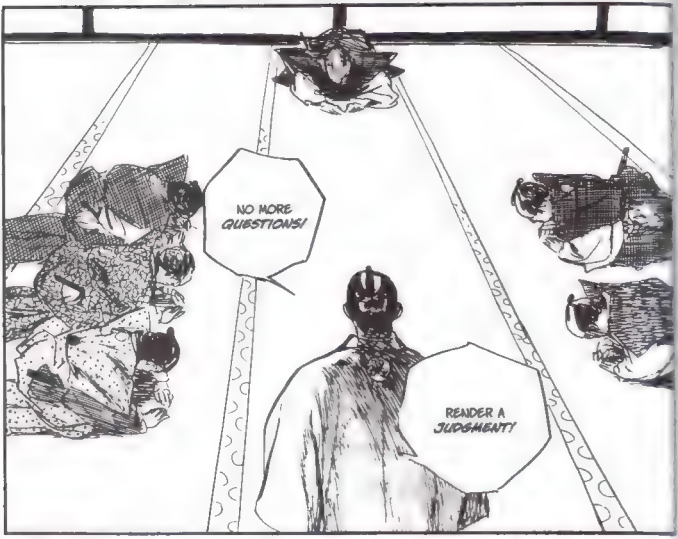
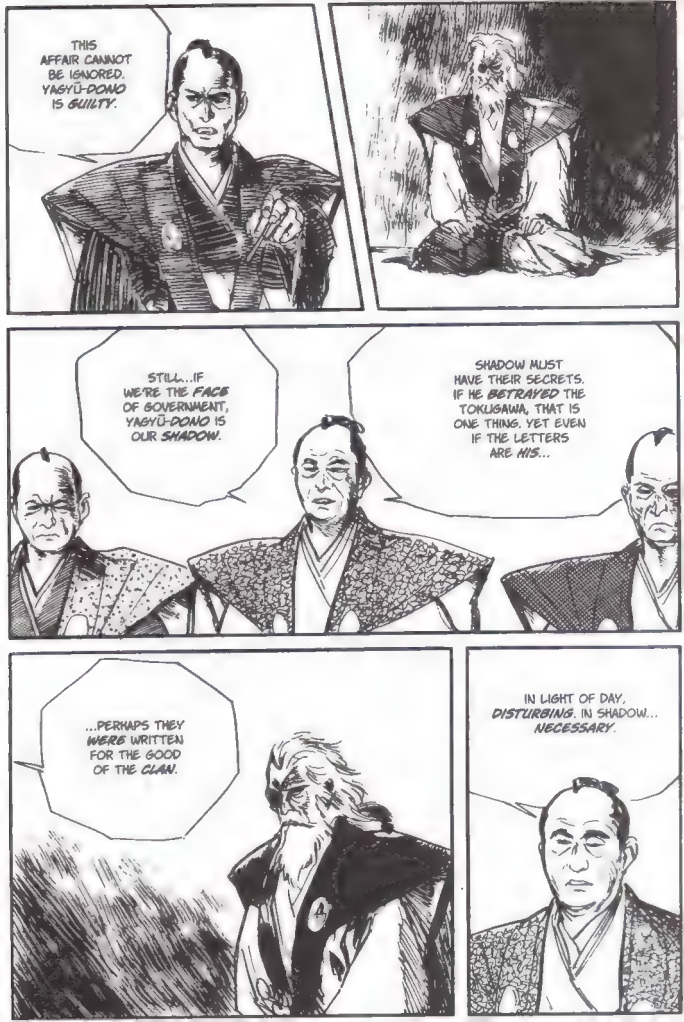
CIRCLES WITHIN CIRCLES!

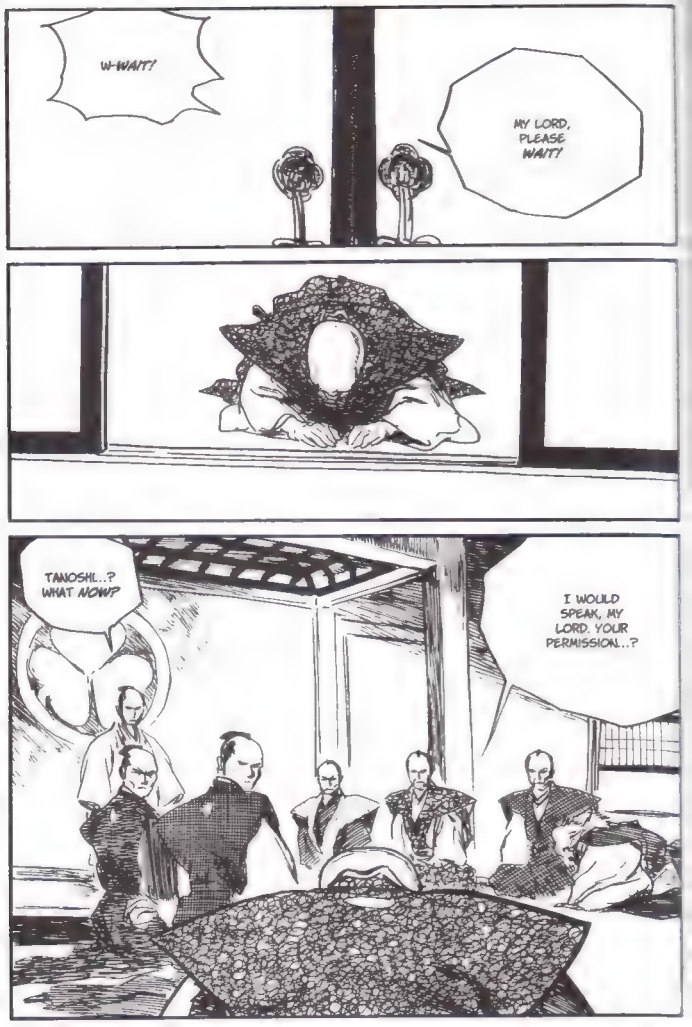

NO MORE QUESTIONS!
RENDER A JUDGMENT!

THEN, MY JUDGMENT.


THIS AFFAIR CANNOT BE IGNORED. YAGYŪ-DONO IS GUILTY.
STILL...IF WE'RE THE FACE OF GOVERNMENT, YAGYŪ-DONO IS OUR SHADOW.
SHADOW MUST HAVE THEIR SECRETS. IF HE BETRAYED THE TOKUGAWA, THAT IS ONE THING. YET EVEN IF THE LETTERS ARE HIS...
...PERHAPS THEY WERE WRITTEN FOR THE GOOD OF THE CLAN.
IN LIGHT OF DAY, DISTURBING. IN SHADOW... NECESSARY.

IT'S STILL AN OUTRAGE. WE NEED JUSTICE!
YET...WE'RE STYMIED WITHOUT EVIDENCE.

I AGREE. NO REAL PROOF.
UNTIL WE KNOW FOR SURE WHO RECEIVED THE LETTERS, WE CAN'T PROSECUTE.
RRG...
RETSUDŌ! YOU ARE UNDER HOUSE ARREST!
MY LORD!


W-WAIT!
MY LORD, PLEASE WAIT!
TANOSHI...? WHAT NOW?
I WOULD SPEAK, MY LORD. YOUR PERMISSION...?

GRANTED.
THE YAGYŪ LETTER YOU SAW WAS HELD BY ŌGAMI ITTŌ, THE FORMER KŌSI KAISHAKUNIN.
NO DOUBT ŌGAMI WANTED TO USE IT IN HIS FEUD WITH YAGYŪ-SAMA.
IN WHICH CASE, HE MUST KNOW WHO WROTE IT, AND TO WHOM.
HRM!

IF WE SUMMON HIM BEFORE THE COURT, TO FACE YAGYŪ-SAMA...
...WHAT THEN?
THE FATE OF THE NATION IS AT STAKE SHOULD WE NOT PURSUE ALL PATHS TO THE TRUTH, LEST DOUBTS LINGER?

FURTHER... YAGYÛ-SAMA HAS PERHAPS FAILED TO CONSIDER A VITAL POINT.
IN HIS PRIVATE FEUD WITH ÔGAMI ITTÔ...
...HE HAS LOST ALL HIS CHILDREN. IN FACT, HIS ENTIRE CLAN.
WHO, THEN, SHALL INHERIT THIS SECRET AND VITAL LIST OF SATOIRI-NINJA...?!

AND MOREOVER— YAGYŪ-SAMA WILL SOON BATTLE ŌGAMI ITTŌ.
IF HE PERISHES, NOT ONLY WILL THERE BE NO MORE SATOIRI-NINJA REPORTS...
...BUT NO ONE WILL KNOW OF THE GRASS PLANTED BY MY LORD'S HONORED ANCESTOR.
YAGYŪ-SAMA SAYS ALL HE DOES IS FOR THE TOKUGAWA. BUT THIS ALONE BELIES IT!

HE PUTS HIMSELF FIRST.
AS THE LETTERS SHOW...
YOU CAN FIND ŌGAMI?
YES, MY LORD.
BRING HIM HERE!
AS YOU COMMAND, MY LORD.
RETSUDŌ!
I HOLD YOU TO YOUR WORD! STAY IN THE CASTLE!

UNDER ABE TANOSHI'S SUPERVISION!
UNDERSTAND?!

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STUDIO PARTE

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DANA LEWIS

lettering & retouch
DIGITAL CHAMELEON

cover illustration
MATT WAGNER

publisher
MIKE RICHARDSON

editor
TIM ERVIN-GORE

assistant editor
JEREMY BARLOW

consulting editor
TOREN SMITH for **STUDIO PROTEUS**

book design
DARIN FABRICK

art director
MARK COX

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IN THESE SMALL HANDS

By KAZUO KOIKE & GOSEKI KOJIMA

子連れ狼

VOLUME

24

A NOTE TO READERS

Lone Wolf and Cub is famous for its carefully researched re-creation of Edo-Period Japan. To preserve the flavor of the work, we have chosen to retain many Edo-Period terms that have no direct equivalents in English. Japanese is written in a mix of Chinese ideograms and a syllabic writing system, resulting in numerous synonyms. In the glossary, you may encounter words with multiple meanings. These are words written with Chinese ideograms that are pronounced the same but carry different meanings. A Japanese reader seeing the different ideograms would know instantly which meaning it is, but these synonyms can cause confusion when Japanese is spelled out in our alphabet. *O-yurushi o* (please forgive us)!

LONE WOLF AND CUB

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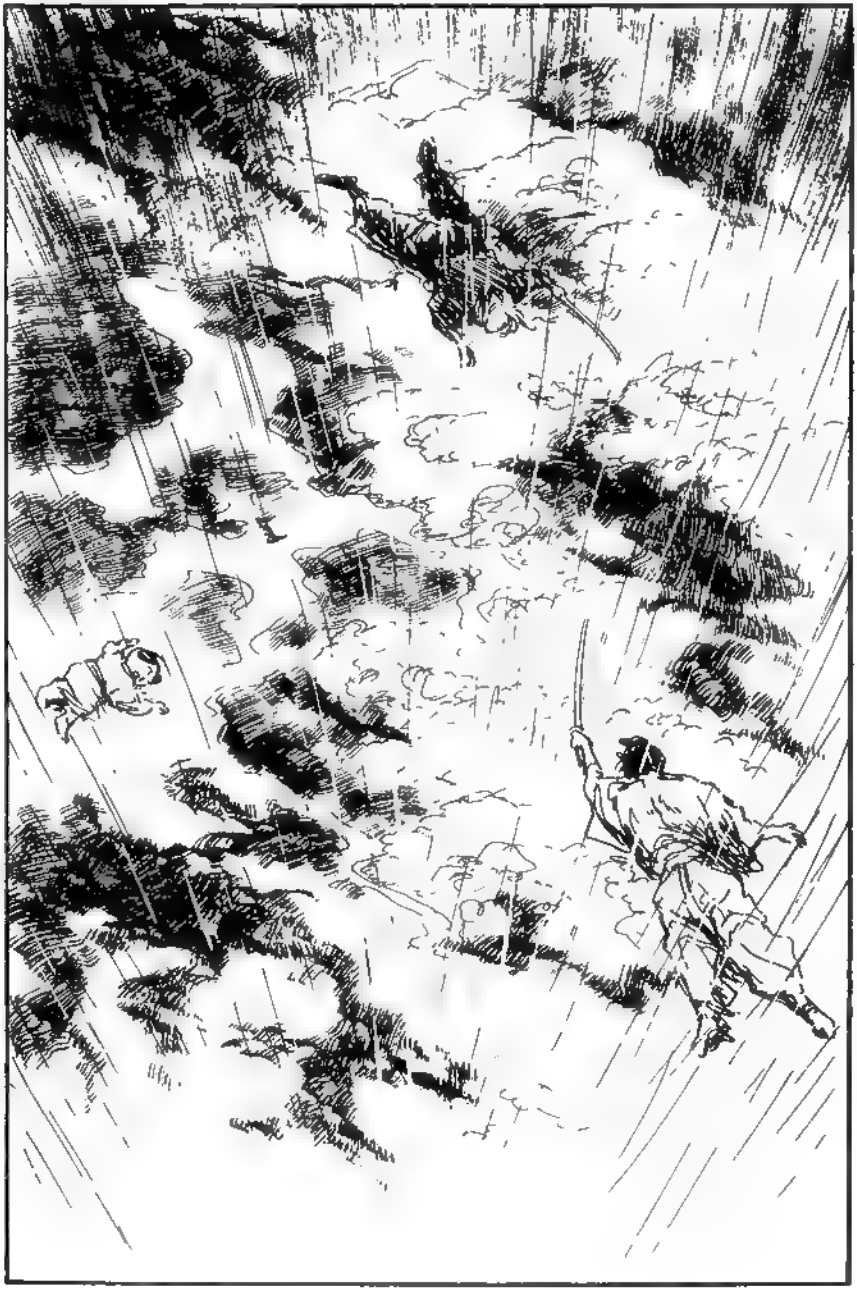
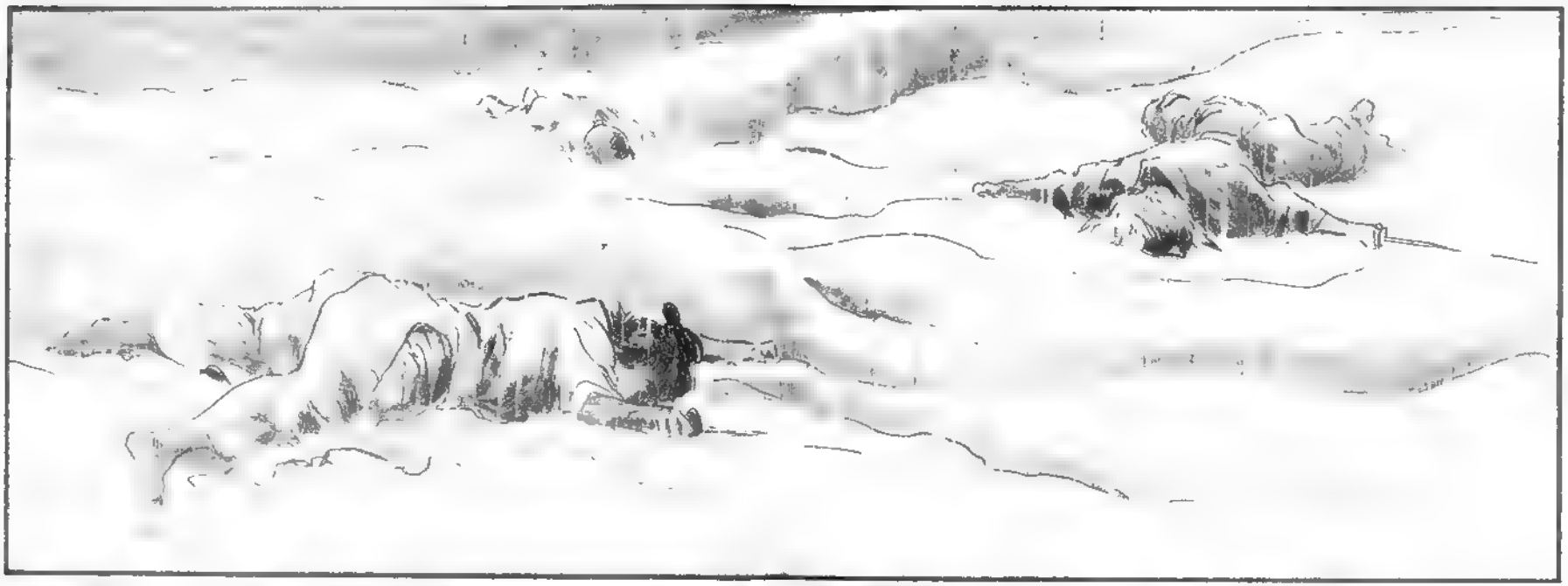
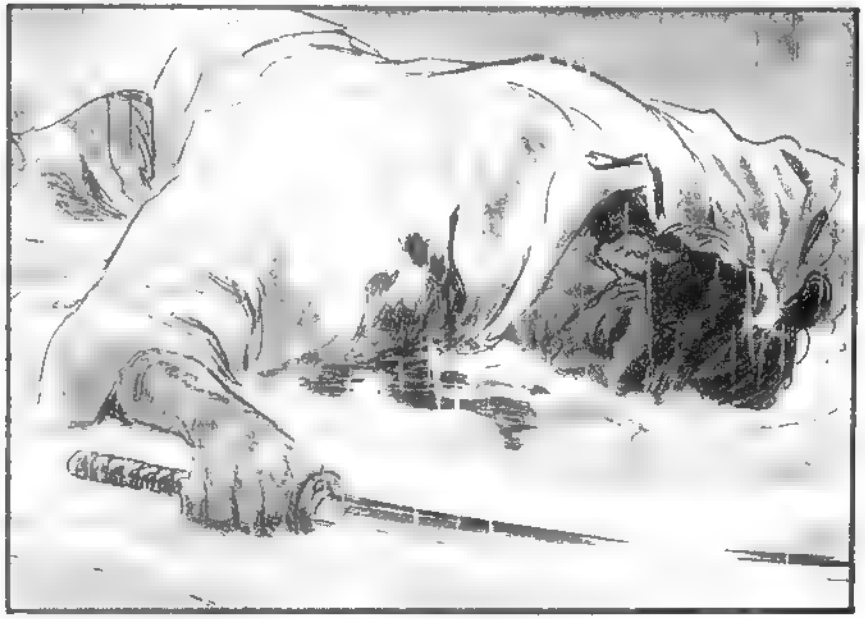
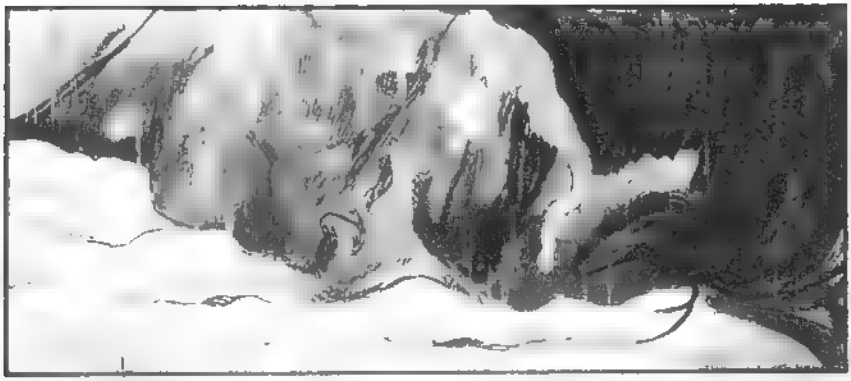
the hundred
and seventeenth

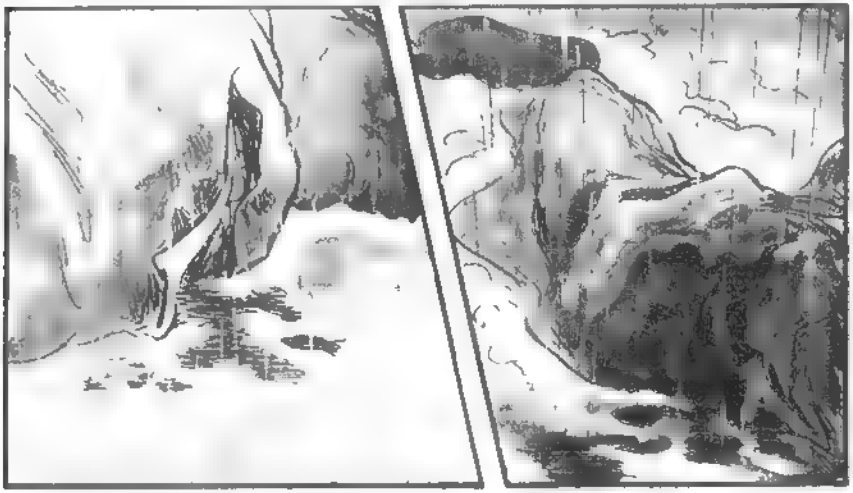
Child of the Fields

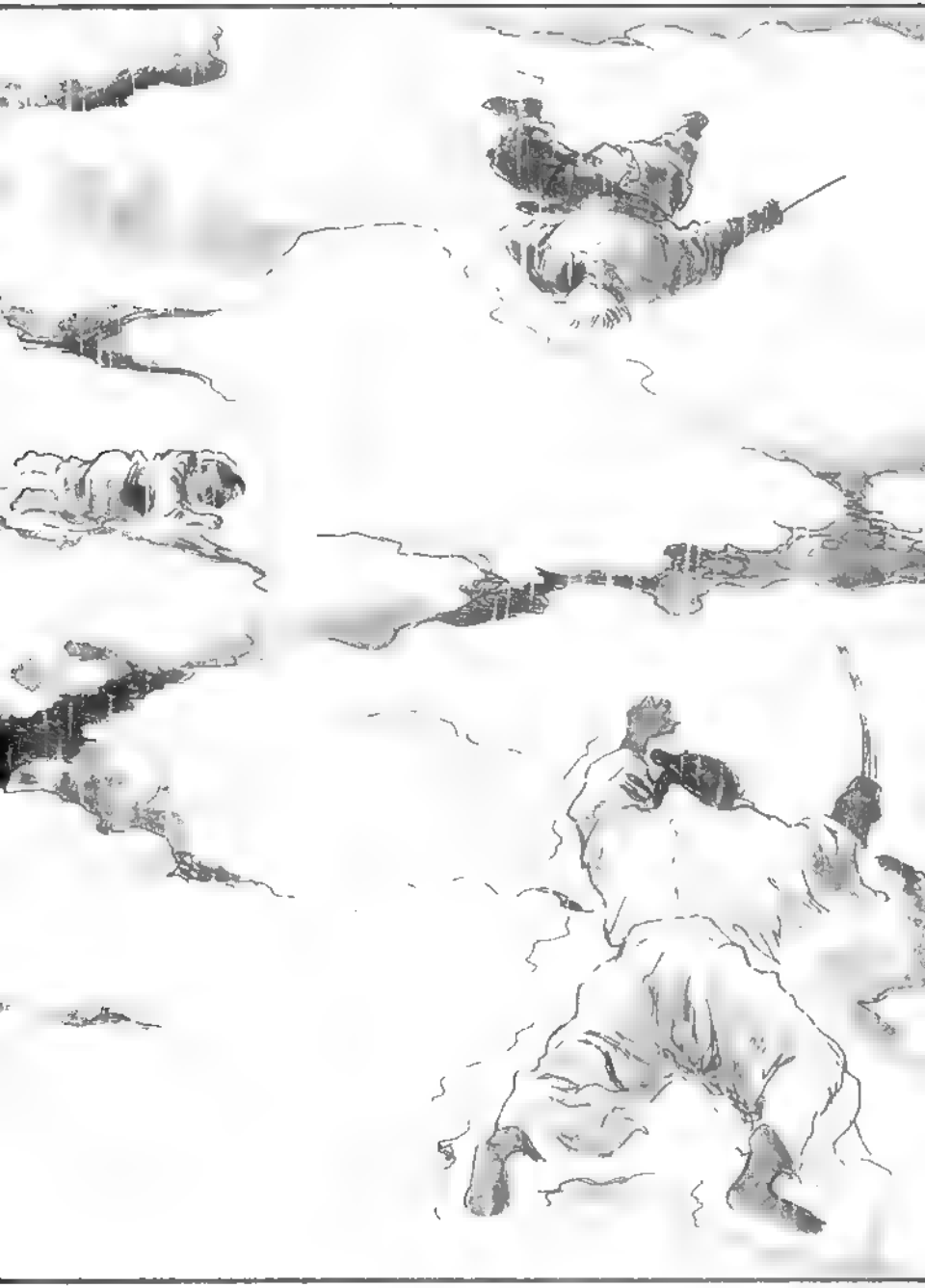


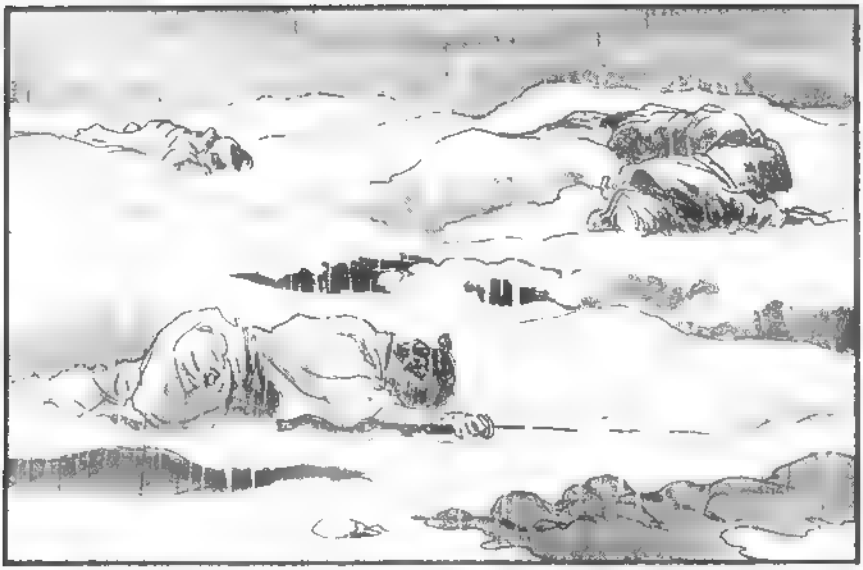


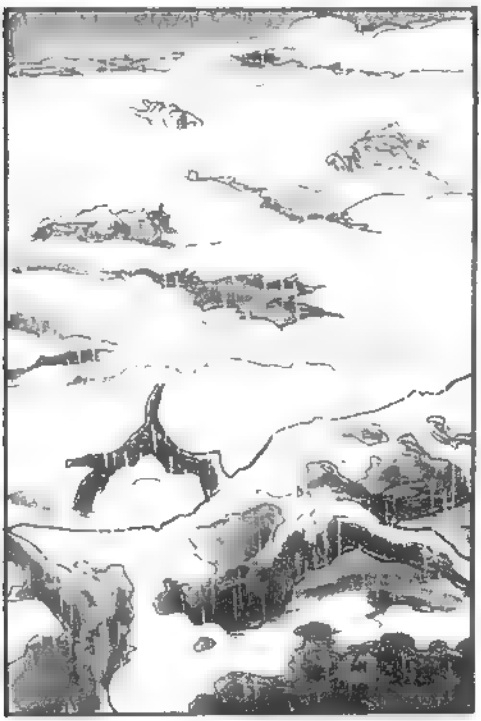


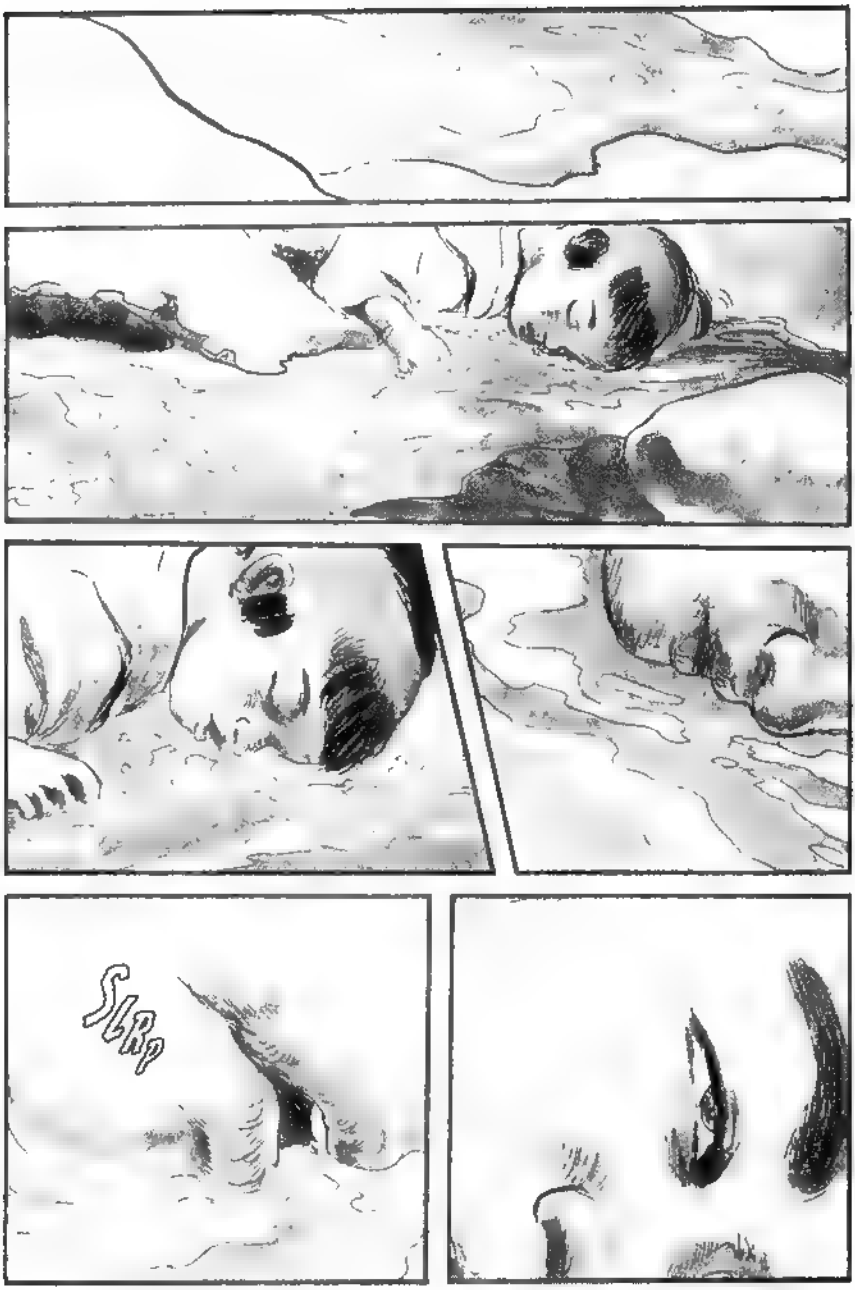








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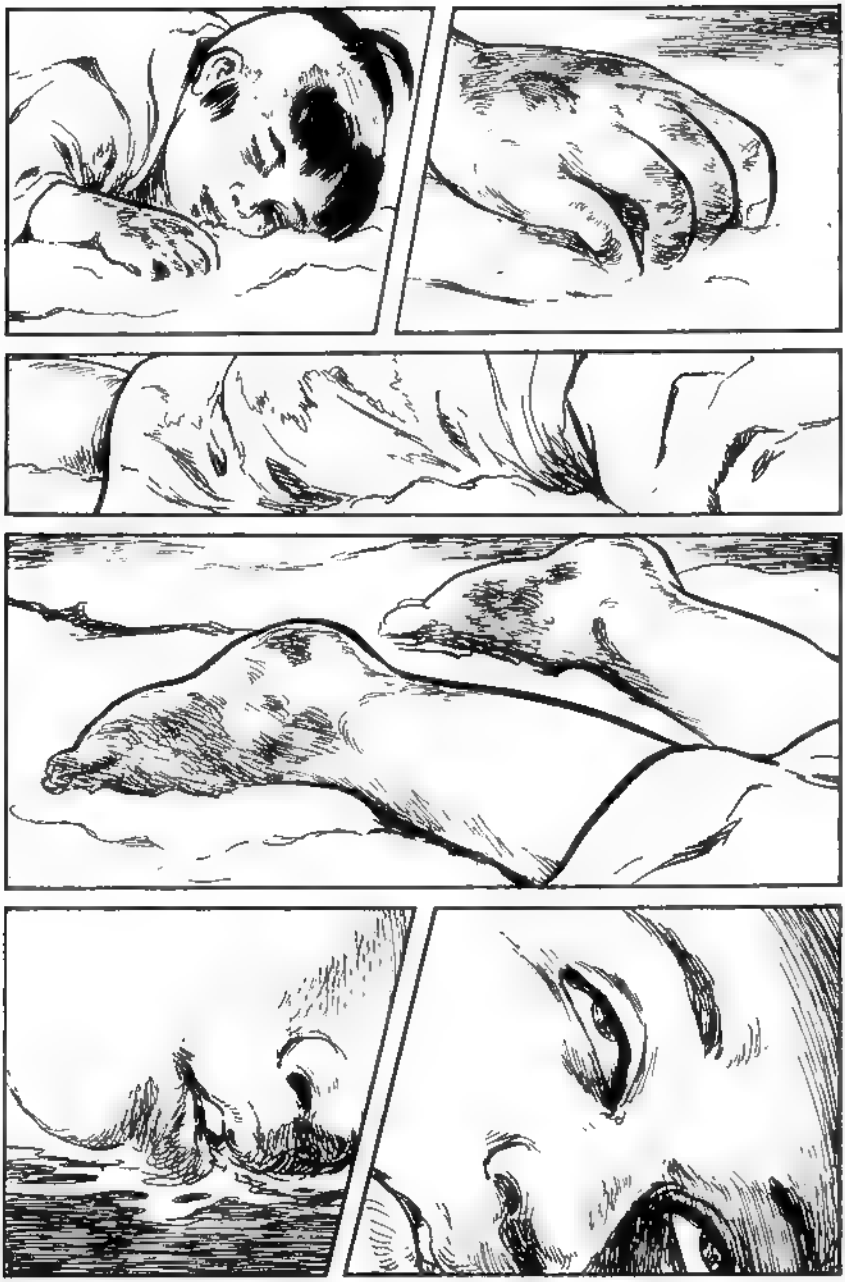
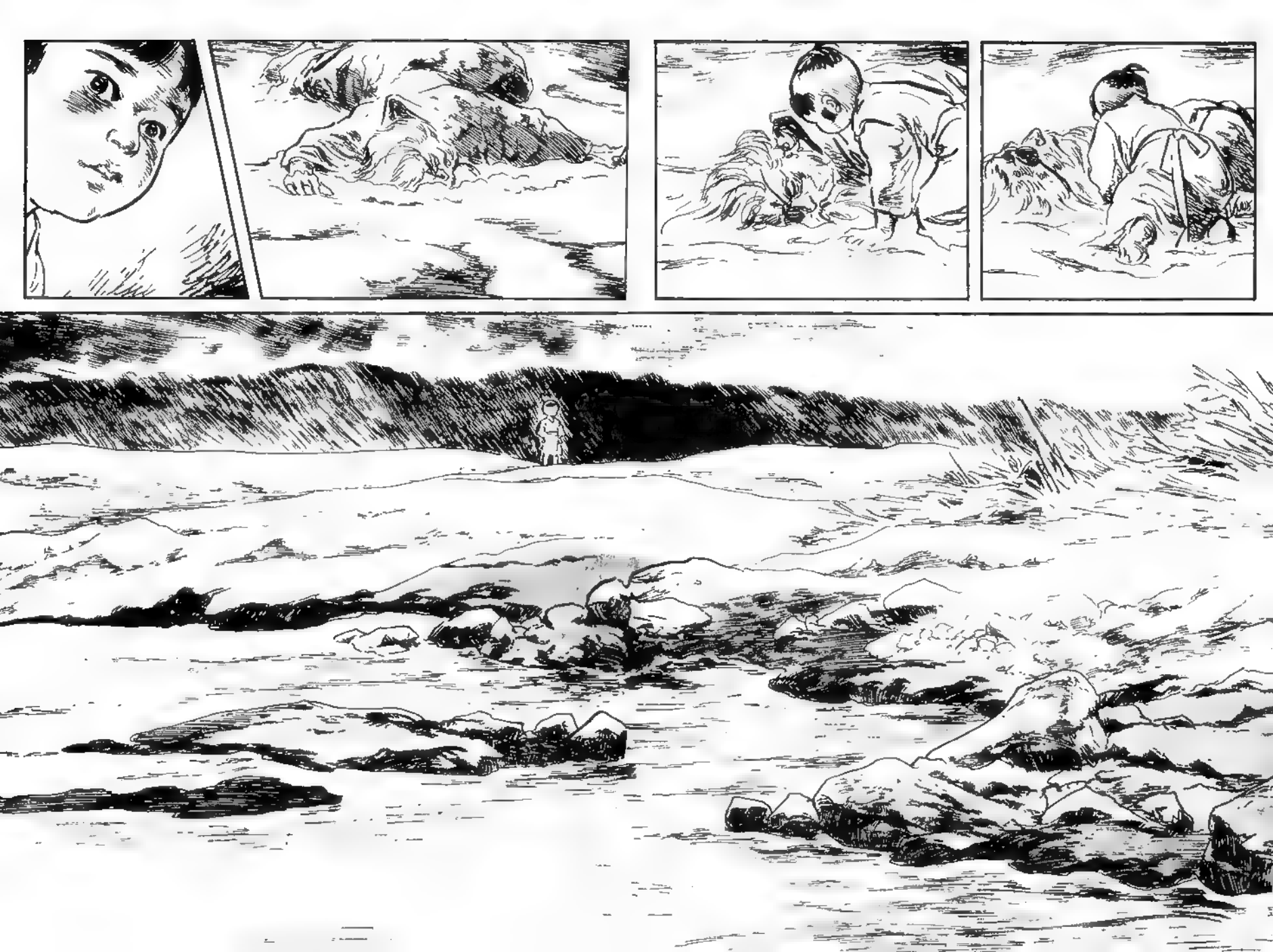
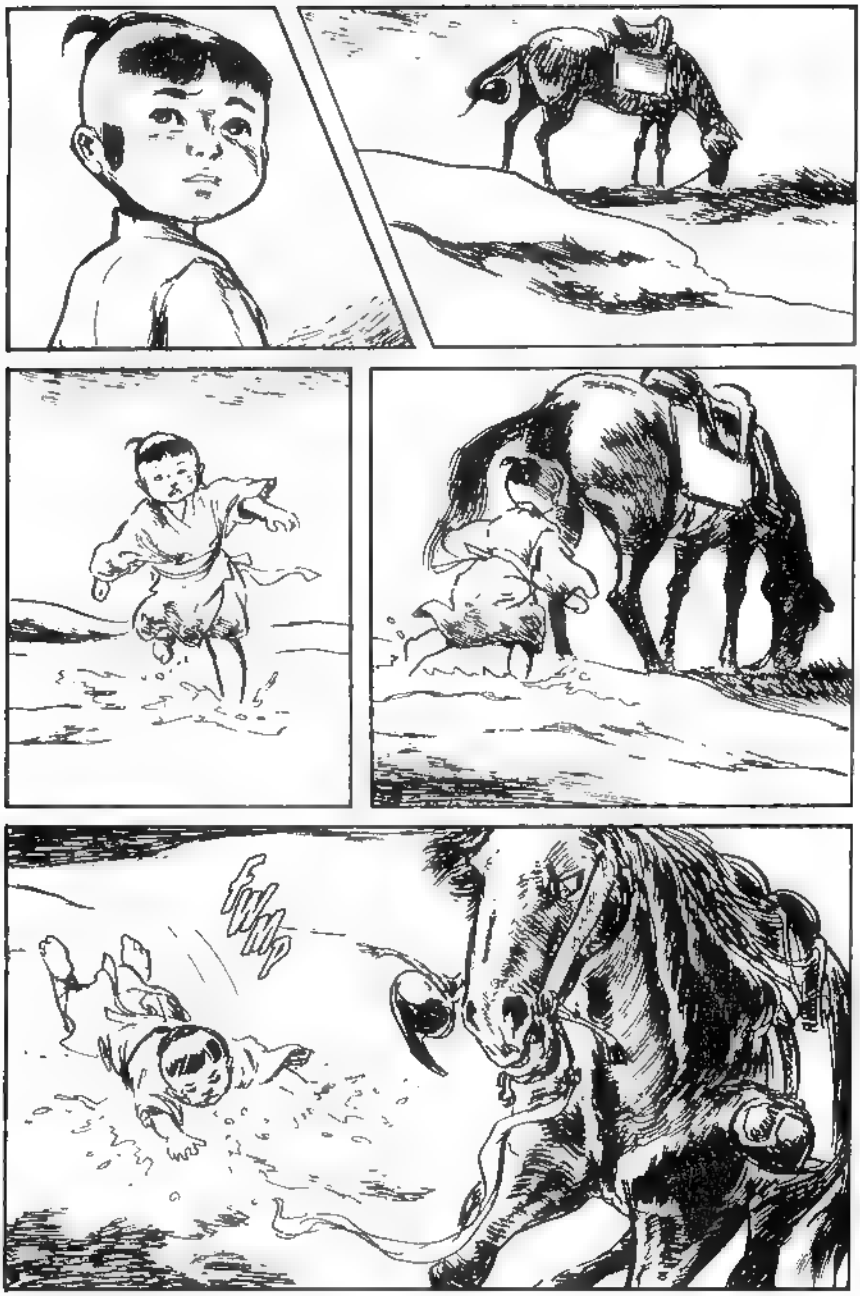
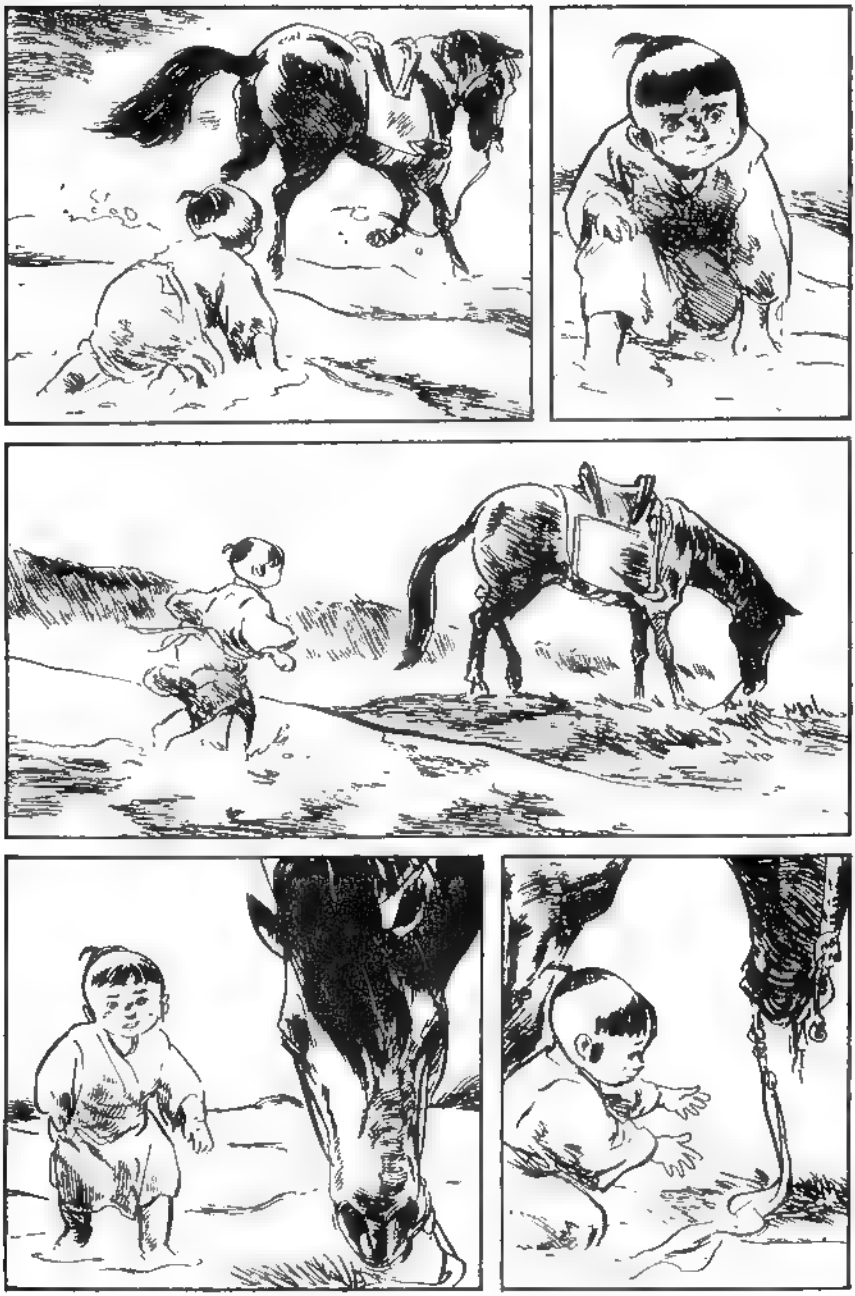


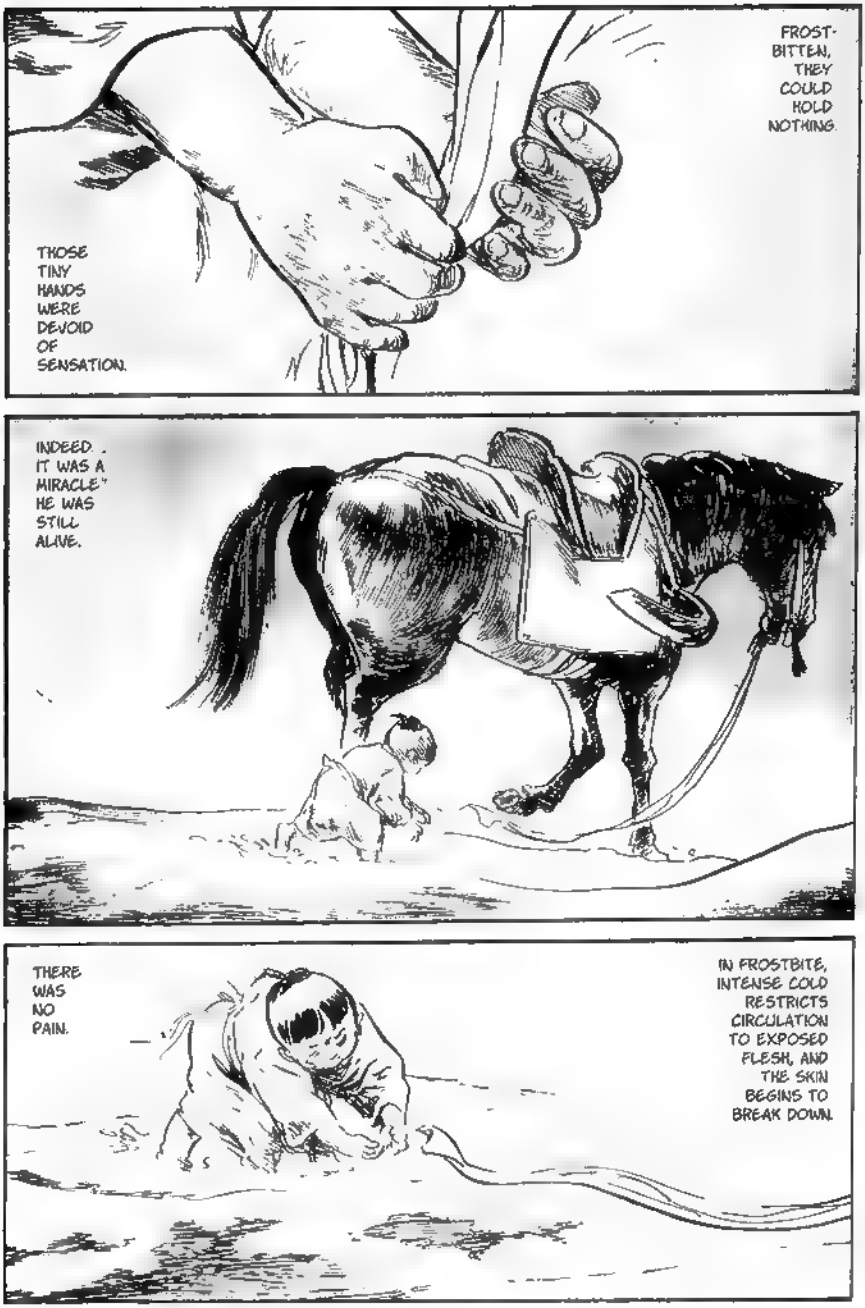
PAPAA!!

PAPAPA!



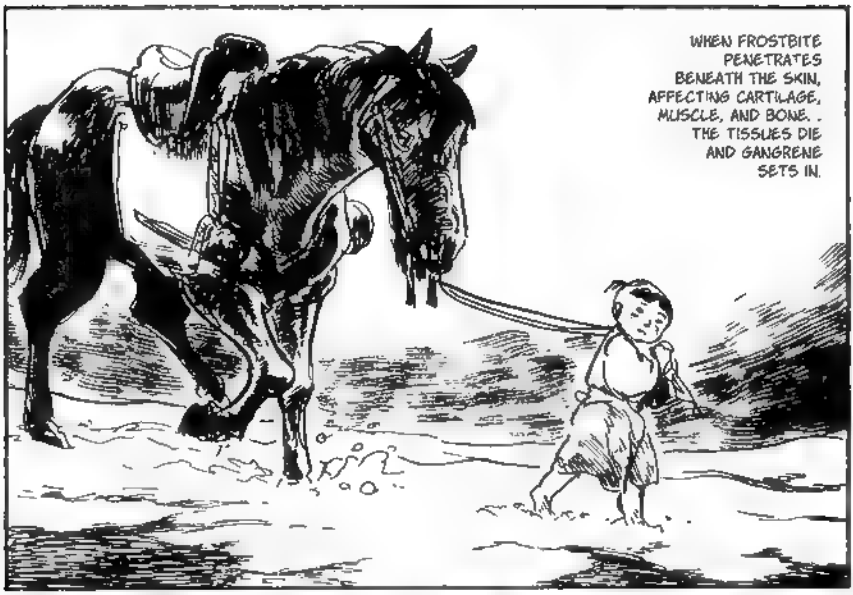




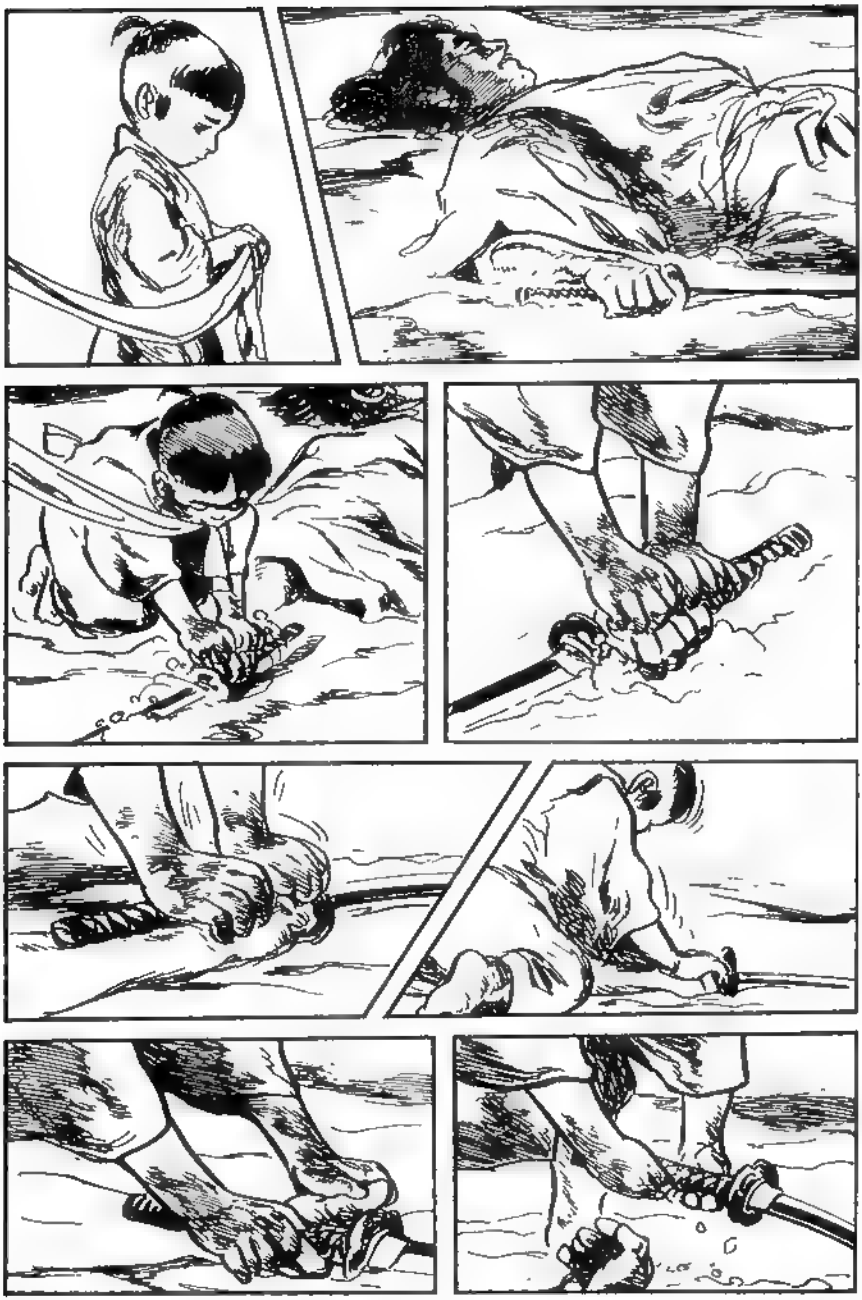

FROST-
BITTEN,
THEY
COULD
HOLD
NOTHING.
THOSE
TINY
HANDS
WERE
DEVOID
OF
SENSATION.
INDEED . .
IT WAS A
MIRACLE"
HE WAS
STILL
ALIVE.
THERE
WAS
NO
PAIN.
IN FROSTBITE,
INTENSE COLD
RESTRICTS
CIRCULATION
TO EXPOSED
FLESH, AND
THE SKIN
BEGINS TO
BREAK DOWN.

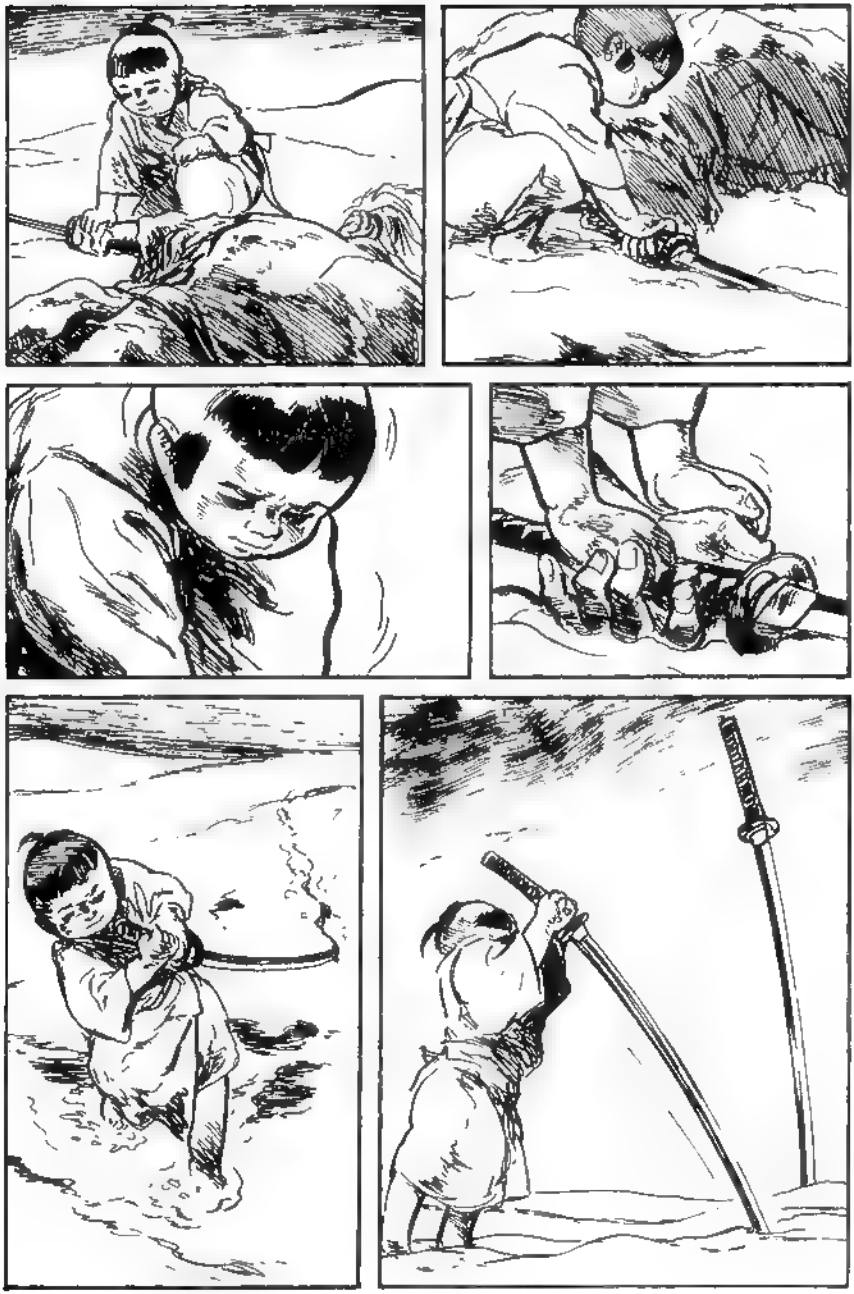
AT FIRST,
BITTER COLD
NEXT,
SEARING PAIN.
AND FINALLY
NOTHING
BY THEN,
THE SKIN ITSELF
TURNS BLUE.
AND BLUE
WAS THE COLOR
OF THESE SMALL
HANDS.

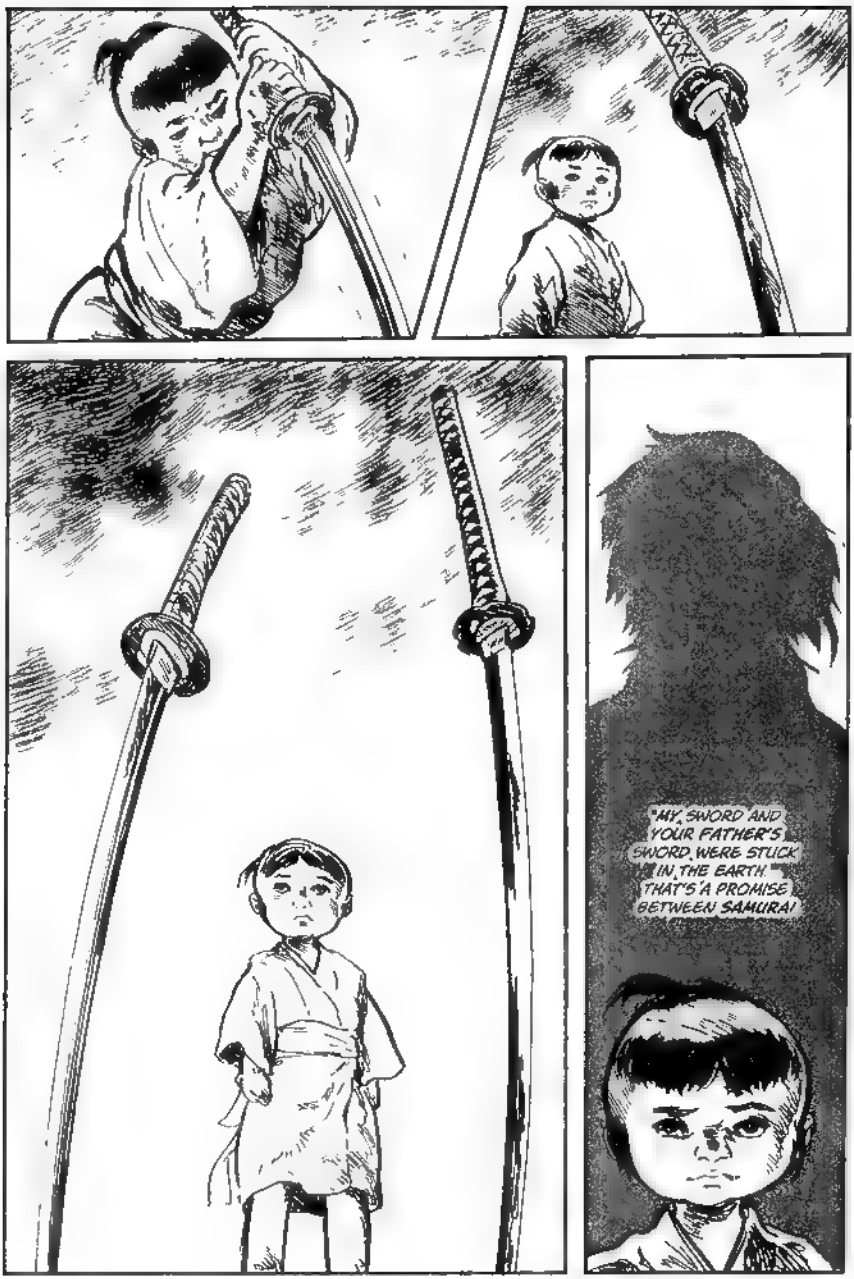
THE CHILD'S FEET WERE THE SAME. HE FELT NOTHING AS HE WALKED.


WHEN FROSTBITE PENETRATES BENEATH THE SKIN, AFFECTING CARTILAGE, MUSCLE, AND BONE. . THE TISSUES DIE AND GANGRENE SETS IN.

SKIN, NAILS, AND EVEN FINGERS FALL OFF BUT OF COURSE, THE BOY KNEW NOTHING OF THIS.

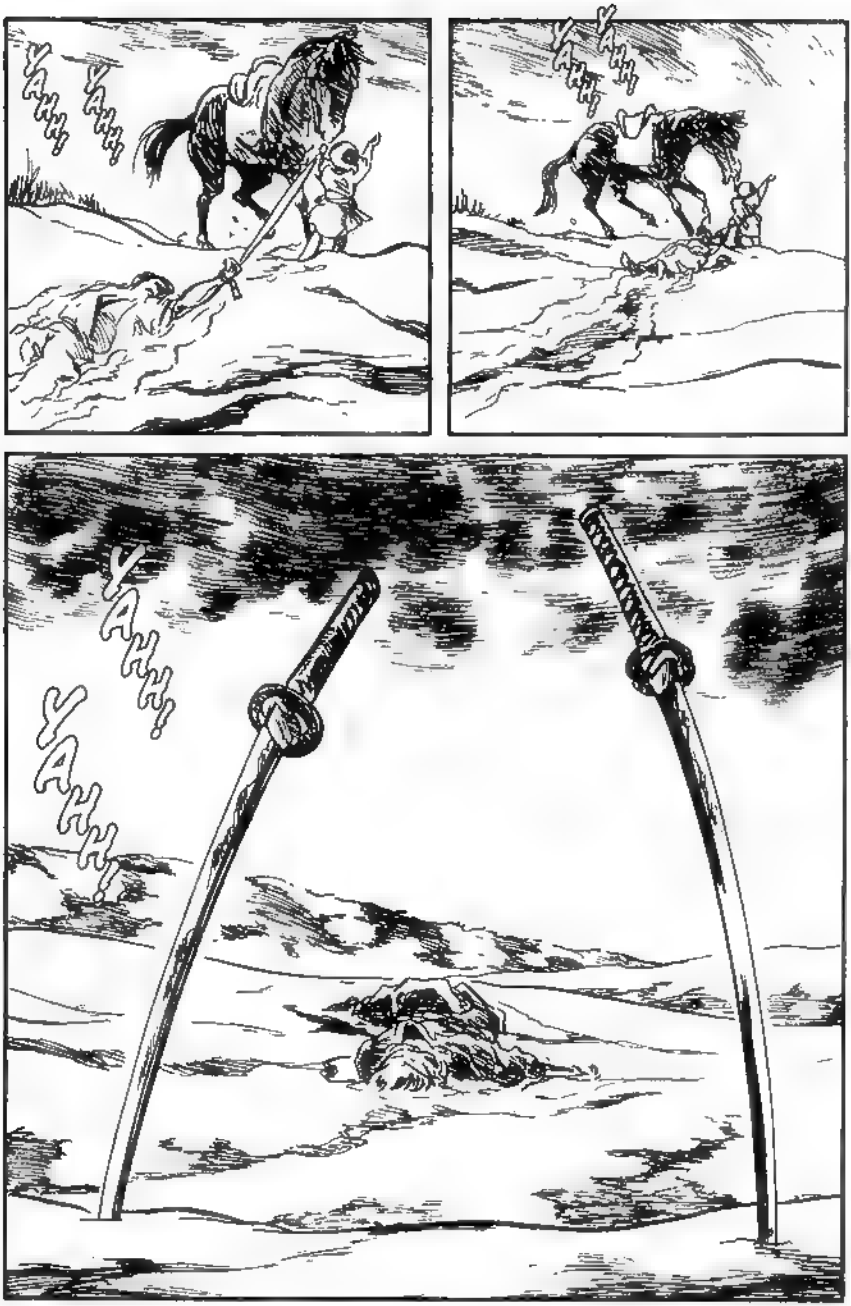





"MY SWORD AND YOUR FATHER'S SWORD WERE STUCK IN THE EARTH. THAT'S A PROMISE BETWEEN SAMURAI!

"IT MEANS TWO THINGS— FIRST, THAT WE'LL NOT FIGHT AGAIN UNTIL WE TAKE UP OUR SWORDS. THE OTHER MEANING— A SILENT PROMISE. SO LONG AS WE LIVE, WE WILL TAKE UP THOSE SWORDS AGAIN, AND FIGHT TO THE DEATH."

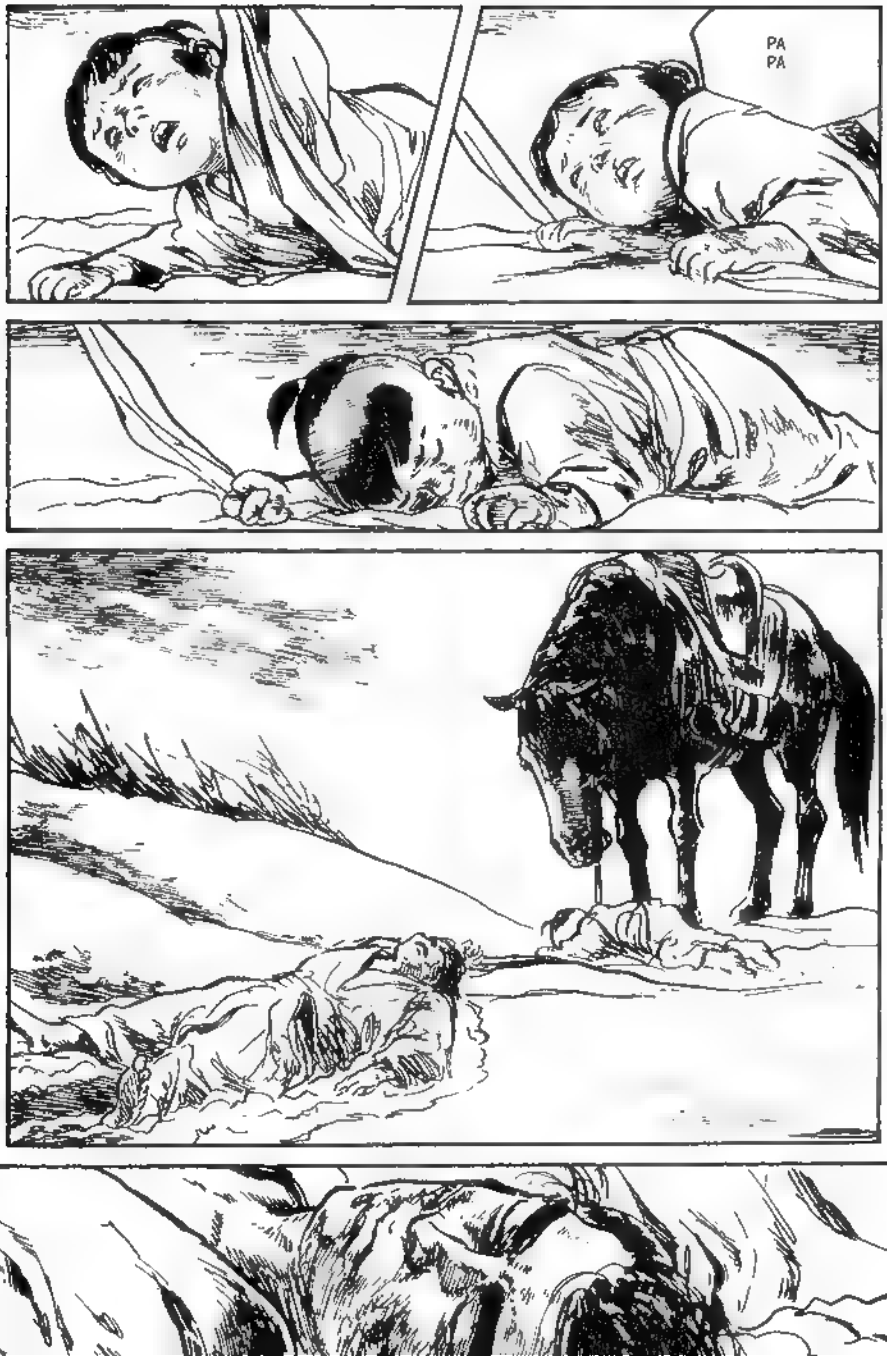
YAHH
YAHHH
YAHH!
YAHH
BUNEEGH
SKSSH


YAHH
YAHH
YAHH
YAHH
YAHH
YAHH

YAHH!
YAHH!
YAHH!
YAHH!
YAHH!
YAHH!
BRRRRR
SKSHH

YAH! YAH!
HAHH... HFF...
YAHH!
YAH!
YAHH!
SKSSHH
SKSSHH

GAHH...
HFF...
SHH
NNG
NFF
Y...
YAHH!
YAHH!
BUGEEN
SKSSHHHH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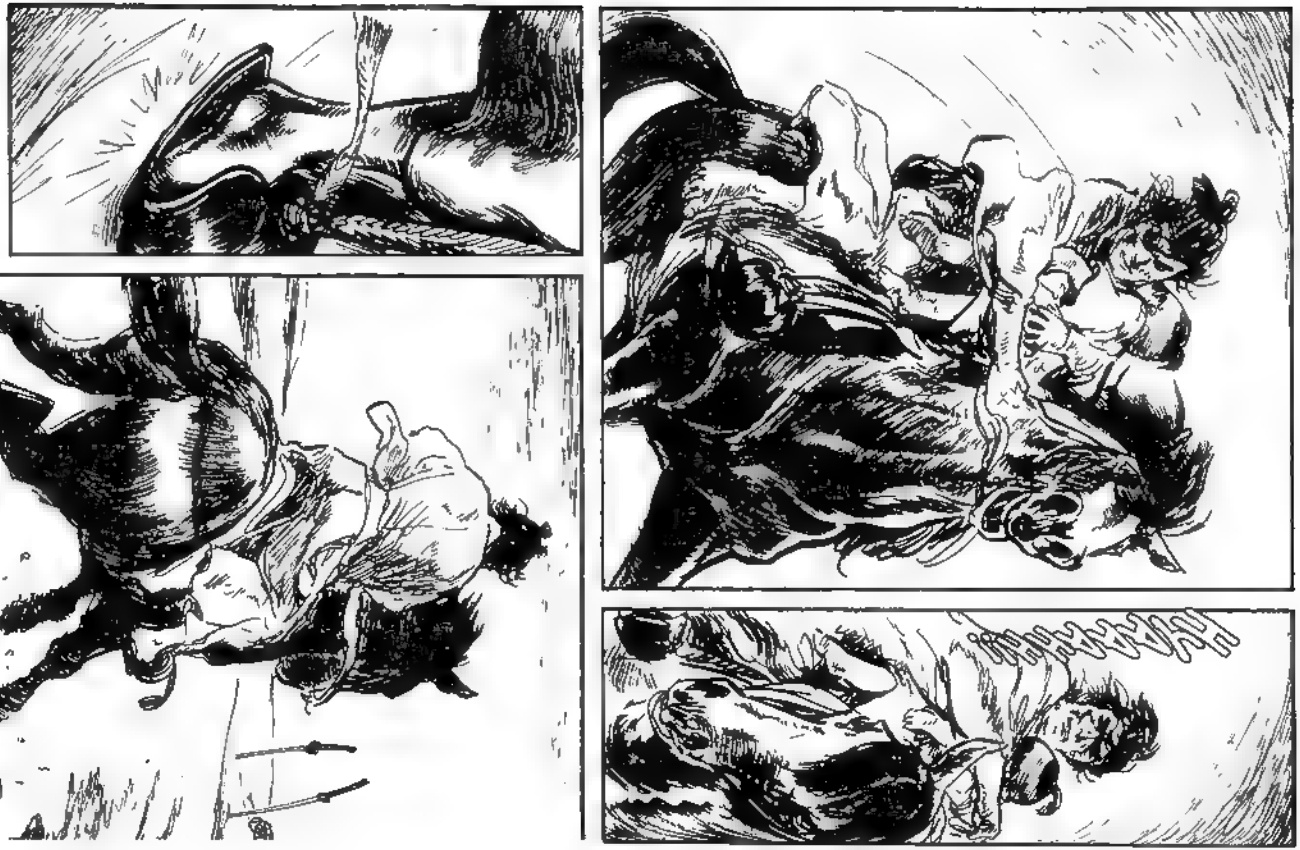
PA

YOU DID THIS. ? YOU?
MY SON.

PAPA .

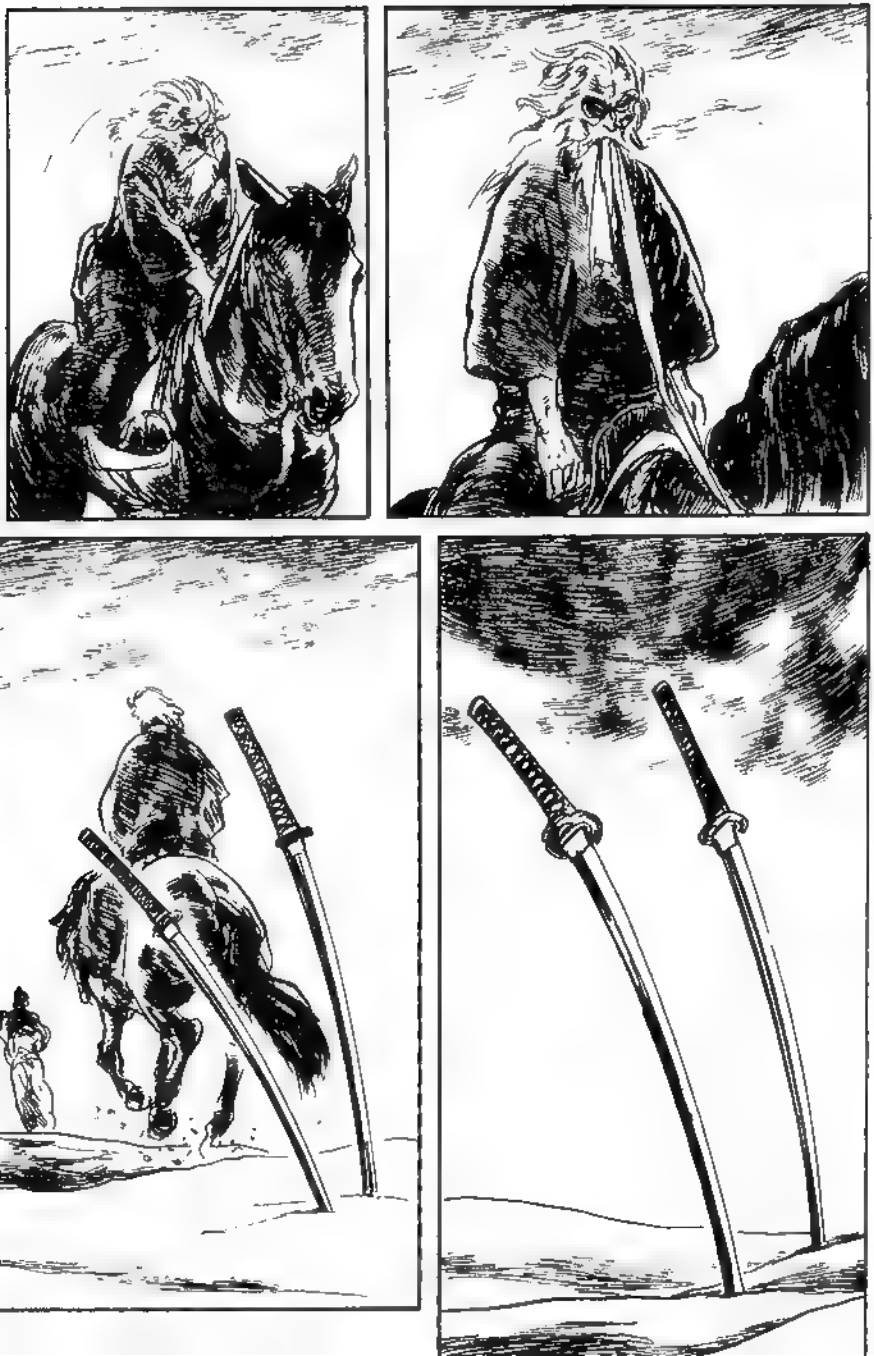


THESE SWORDS...!
YOU..?
NO.
THEN. THE BOY DID IT...?
SUPERB..
AGAIN ..?
YES!

KRH! WE TREMBLE
THE POISON STILL WORKS ITS EVIL..
NNG..
HRG.

ITTŌ.
WE CANNOT
BATTLE
NOW.
WE'LL
SET A
DAY...?
AGREED.

ITTŌ, WAIT
WHY NOT RIDE...?
IT MUST BE DIFFICULT FOR YOU TO WALK.
YOU LEAVE IT FOR ME?
IT IS A YAGYŪ HORSE
YET YOU SUFFER FROM THE POISON, TOO. .



ITTŌ.
STAY WITH ME. REST WITH YOUR SON.

MY HOME IS EMPTY NOW.
AND I OWE YOU FOR BURYING MY MEN.
WILL YOU COME, ITTŌ?
LEAVE US BE, RETSUDŌ.

YOUR SON WILL DIE WITHOUT TREATMENT.
DESTINY FATE.
IF HE NEEDS HELP FROM OUR ENEMY .. HE'S ALREADY DEAD.
HRM! ISN'T THAT .?

MM. KAII.
NO BUSHI HEART BUT UNMATCHED OBSESSION!

I SEE...
HE POISONS OUR SWORDS, THEN CLIMBS UP TO WATCH.

THIS FOOL RUINED OUR BATTLE.
I'LL TAKE HIM BACK TO THE COMPOUND AND SEE THAT HE PAYS. BUT .. HE'S ALSO THE ONLY MAN WHO CAN *CURE* US.
COME WITH ME, ITTŌ! HE IS OUR COMMON *FOE* ..
.. THOUGH HIS BITES ARE NO MORE THAN THOSE OF A FLEA.

UHHG.
I SEE FACES. ITTŌ. RETSUDŌ. SO CLOSE.
THAT'S RIGHT.. FELL OFF THE TEMPLE..
..I MUST HAVE DIED, TOO..
SO IF I SEE THEIR FACES...
AND THIS IS HELL!

I MANAGE TO KILL BOTH ITTO AND RETSUDO AND I FOLLOW THEM?
HOW STUPID CAN I GET? ABE-NO-KAII, THE MAN WHO COULD HAVE RULED THE NATION... AND INSTEAD I... I.. .... .. ?
HRM. .?!
DAMN SOLID, THESE SPIRITS... WHY ..?
WELCOME BACK, KAII.
YOU'RE NOT IN HELL . YET

WE, AND YOU, STILL ALIVE.
B. BUT .
THANKS TO YOUR POISON, WE COULDN'T HOLD OUR SWORDS. SO WE DECLARED A TEMPORARY TRUCE. AND BROUGHT YOU HERE—
TO THE YAGYŪ MANSION!!
WH- WHAT ...?!
GUAHH
AHGG! IT HURTS!
IDIOT!!

AIIIEE! D-DON'T–
KAI!!
MIX US A CURE FOR THESE TREMORS!
I... C-CAN'T! NOT HERB...
I NEED... HERBS... SPECIAL HERBS...
YOU'RE IN THE HOUSE OF THE YAGYŪ, FOOL. WE HAVE EVERYTHING.
AH! UH... Y-YES...
OF... OF COURSE.
GRCCH!
GCCH
RRGG... ALL THOSE HOURS IN THE SNOW...CAN NOTHING KILL THEM?!

THOSE WOUNDS... MY POISON... AND THEY JUST GET THE SHAKES?!
THE GODS MUST LIKE 'EM. DAMN!
GCCH KCCH
LOOK AT ME! I MAKE MY POISON TO CRIPPLE THEM, AND NOW I'M MAKING AN ANTIDOTE...?
THIS DOESN'T MAKE ANY SENSE...
I'M JUST RUNNING IN CIRCLES... BAH!
ALLOW ME...

"GOETSU DŌSHŪ"... "THE LAMB LIES DOWN WITH THE LION."
BUT INSTEAD... WOLF AND TIGER...?
...AND ME?
GOETSU DŌSHŪ: WOLF AND TIGER, IN A SINGLE BOAT... WITH POISON.